The Unfulfilled Prophecy

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/18388004.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, Winston (Hannibal), Beverly Katz, Abigail Hobbs, Freddie Lounds, Abel Gideon, Jack Crawford, Anthony Dimmond, Roman Fell, Reba McClane, Miriam Lass, Francis Dolarhyde
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Harry Potter Setting, Professor Hannibal Lecter, Professor Harry Potter, Animagus Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter is a Cannibal, Will Graham is a Cannibal, Abigail Hobbs is a Cannibal, Abigail Hobbs Lives, Adopted Abigail Hobbs, Established Relationship, Alternate Universe - Magic, Prophecy, Flashbacks, Non-Linear Narrative, Bottom Will Graham, Top Hannibal Lecter, Murder Kink, Murder Husbands, Dark Will Graham, Canon-Typical Violence, Injury, Character Death, Murder Family
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2019-04-07 Completed: 2019-08-20 Words: 43,292 Chapters: 11/11

The Unfulfilled Prophecy

by HigherMagic

Summary

The legends say that there was once a mighty wizard, who would overcome even death, and be resurrected with enough power to rule over the world. That beast fell to a mere boy – not once, not twice, but many times over, until finally he was destroyed, and the world was at peace.

But there was a second prophecy, that told of another powerful wizard, worse than the one that came before him. Only one child would be capable of defeating him, and he was groomed as a youth to confront this Dark Lord, to see him destroyed just as the first had been.

But the second Dark Lord never came. Prophecy became legend, legend became myth. The world was at peace – that's what everyone kept saying. Soothsayers and those skilled with divination were ignored, their cries turning into little more than whispers, and the tale was forgotten.

Notes

YO SO WHO WANTS A HANNIGRAM HP AU?

I'm going to say this only once: the houses I sorted them into are my opinion, and you're not going to change my mind. I hope throughout the story you can see why I placed them in their respective houses, but if you disagree, let's just agree to disagree.

This story is going to turn into a beast if all goes as planned. There will be flashbacks to Will and Hannibal as students, as well as in the future, when Abigail is older. I'll do my best to make it obvious when each scene is happening, but for now we're in the 'present'. Expect flashbacks and flash-forwards in the next few chapters (as well as, of course, the rating going up to explicit because lbr student!Hannigram doing dirty stuff in broom cupboards is a void that needs filling, pun intended).

I don't intend to bring any actual Harry Potter characters into this story. It takes place after the events of The Deathly Hallows - how long ago that happened is up to you.

Also, I hate writing prophecies.

Enjoy!

Chapter 1

There will be born a boy of ice,
Within the darkness there is flame.
Their souls entwined, Conquerors twice,
One will hold the victor's name.
The other takes, will overcome
And make the Dark Lord's work undone.

The legends say that there was once a mighty wizard, who would overcome even death, and be resurrected with enough power to rule over the world. That beast fell to a mere boy – not once, not twice, but many times over, until finally he was destroyed, and the world was at peace.

But there was a second prophecy, that told of another powerful wizard, worse than the one that came before him. Only one child would be capable of defeating him, and he was groomed as a youth to confront this Dark Lord, to see him destroyed just as the first had been.

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Hannibal smiles as the host of first years trawl into the Great Hall, wide-eyed and amazed as they gaze upon the hanging candles, the large spread of rich food in a myriad of dishes; roast chicken, green salad, soft bread rolls; pies and cakes and thick, sweet splashes of color in the form of corn and red potatoes and broccoli heads. Above the candles, the illusion of a calm starry sky spreads out across the ceiling, flickers of wispy clouds and the bright, happy moon as she stares down at them with an unblinking eye.

He sits three chairs down from the Headmaster's seat, on the left, closer to the Ravenclaw and Gryffindor table. He watches the little gathering of first years – they are a small batch, this year, and seem to get progressively younger and younger in his eyes.

Within the group, he spots a familiar shock of dark hair, bright blue eyes within a pale face. A girl, eleven just like the rest. She meets his eyes and smiles widely at him, giving a little wave from where her hands hang at her sides, discreet.

Hannibal inclines his head to her, but doesn't let himself linger long. Beside him, the Head of Slytherin, Freddie, shifts her weight and purses her lips.

"Small group this year," she notes.

Hannibal nods. "I hear a lot of parents are sending their children to muggle schools for their first years, so they may learn things like math, and science." He smiles at her indignant huff. "You disapprove?"

"Magic needs to be controlled, first," Freddie says. "This integration with muggles will be the death of all of us."

Hannibal resists the urge to scowl at her. "Don't let Crawford hear you talk like that."

She breathes out, and rolls her eyes.

From behind them, a door opens, and a large grey wolf-dog trots out with the Sorting Hat perched atop its head. Hannibal smiles, and watches as the children giggle in glee at seeing the animal come in. Behind him, another dog follows. This one is brindle, and smaller than the first, and they both come and stand on either side of the little stool where first years will sit and be sorted.

Headmaster Crawford stands, from his large seat, and fixes the children with a stern look. "Welcome back, and welcome to the new students who will be joining us this year. Take a look around you – these halls will become your home for the next seven years. These students and this staff will become your family. Memorize their faces, make yourselves comfortable, and may you all become great witches and wizards in these hallowed halls."

He sits, and Beverly stands. Technically, she is not a professor, but most of the students call her Miss Bev. She takes the Sorting Hat from the grey dog's head, grinning at the animal when he wags his tail wildly, and unrolls a scroll that has all the names of the new students.

The dogs rise, and pad over to the other end of the long staff table. The grey one climbs into an empty chair and sits with a huff, and Hannibal hides his smile when Freddie rolls her eyes again. The brindle mutt curls up beneath the table, ears forward and eyes attentive as Bev calls the first name.

"Nicolas Boyle!"

A tallish, lanky boy steps up, wide-eyed and nervous. He sits, and Beverly smiles kindly at him, placing the hat on his head. A few moments later, the hat's voice rings out; "Hufflepuff!"

The Hufflepuff house cheers, and Nicolas smiles, standing once Beverly removes the hat, and goes to join his peers. He sits beside a girl a little older than him, but they embrace with familiarity, and Hannibal recalls her last name is Boyle also – siblings. "Marissa Schurr!" A girl with thick black hair and olive skin steps forward, and the hat puts her into Ravenclaw. Hannibal makes note of her face, as he watches her go to the cheering table, filing her away as one of his own.

"Georgia Madchen!"

The hat barely touches her head before it cries; "Hufflepuff!"

Another series of children come and go, sorted to their respective houses. "Hufflepuff will double in size this year," Professor Gideon, to Hannibal's right, notes. He's the Herbology professor, and head of that house. Hannibal smiles.

"A welcome change," he notes. "Too many Gryffindors last year."

Freddie huffs, but says nothing.

Then; "Abigail Hobbs!"

Hannibal straightens, leaning his forearms on the table, his hands folded. At the end of the table, in his periphery, he sees the big grey dog perk up in a similar way. Abigail flushes under the attention, walks slowly up to the stool, and sits. Beverly places the hat upon her head.

For a long time, there is only silence. Abigail's eyes close, and she breathes out heavily, slim shoulders curling in. The grey dog at the end of the table lets out a quiet whine.

Then, loudly; "Slytherin!"

Hannibal sighs, but makes sure he is smiling when Abigail looks at him. He gives her a nod of encouragement, and she bows her head, going over the table and taking a seat. Though she appears reluctant to sit, she is greeted in a friendly way by a boy that Hannibal remembers being sorted to that same house last year – a Jessie Turner, if Hannibal recalls. Smart kid, keeps his nose clean. Good at potions.

He looks down the staff table, finds that the big dog is grinning, jaws parted and panting.

The rest of the children are sorted, and Hannibal sits back, tuning out Jack's repetition of the warnings about the third floor and the – admittedly, much safer these days since Will became the groundskeeper – Forbidden Forest. Then, when announcements are done, the children are free to eat, and Hannibal's plate fills with an offering of chicken breast, spinach salad, and warm mashed potatoes. Freddie, beside him, has only a salad piled heavily with cherry tomatoes, feta cheese, sliced strawberries, and walnuts.

"You seemed more invested than usual, this year," she says coolly, after a moment of silence, hardly audible beneath the murmurs of the children and the other staff.

She spears a tomato and delicately bites it from her fork, fixing Hannibal with a sharp smile.

"Should I not show interest in the Sorting ceremony?" Hannibal replies, just as calmly.

Freddie's eyes narrow. "I'm not stupid, Hannibal," she says, her voice growing somewhat icier. "You know that one girl." She nods to Abigail, her back turned where she's sitting, but she seems to have grown more comfortable even in so short a time – she is a chameleon, taking after her father.

Hannibal sighs through his nose, and delicately strips a bite of chicken from the whole, eating it slowly as Freddie lets out another series of complaining noises, annoyed at being made to wait for his answer. "At least you cannot claim I play favorites," Hannibal simply replies, and smiles at her. "She's not in my house."

Freddie's eyes narrow. "That's right. She's in mine."

Hannibal keeps his smile placid and calm. "I'm sure she'll prove a vital asset to the Slytherin reputation," he purrs, and watches her lips turn down, her eyes narrowing further. Finally, she relents with another huff, and turns her attention back to her salad. Even the way she eats is haughty.

At the other end of the table, the grey dog has both forelegs on the table, and is gnawing at a large ham bone. Hannibal smiles, a flood of affection passing through him as he watches. Beside the dog, Beverly sits, and she gives him a pat on the head, tugging on an ear. He ignores her, as he always does when Beverly tries to treat him like a puppy.

The meal lasts for a while, until all the students are droopy-eyed and full-bellied. Then, each prefect stands, calling for the rest to follow them to their respective dormitories. Hannibal watches Abigail leave, and then he stands, and smiles as the dog trots over to him and pushes his muzzle into Hannibal's hand.

They leave in silence, the brindle mutt following his larger companion, tail wagging. They leave the Great Hall, and pass out into the courtyard, then through the door that leads to the path, which winds down the large hill steeply, towards the edge of the Forbidden Forest, where the groundskeeper dwells.

The dogs follow Hannibal inside, and the grey one waits until the door closes, before he stretches and yawns widely, shakes his pelt, and melts cleanly into his human shape. Hannibal smiles at Will, going to him and embracing him warmly as Will turns to him, his smile wide enough to show his dimples and his sharper-than-average canines.

He kisses Hannibal eagerly, curling his fingers in Hannibal's robes as the brindle mutt yawns and trots over to the fireplace, curled up and content to rest. "You sure know how to make a first impression, my love," he murmurs to Will's sweet, pink mouth. Will grins at him, lets out a quiet growl, and kisses him again.

"I was too excited," he replies. "I've waited so long for Abigail to come here. I wouldn't have been able to keep my cool like you do."

Hannibal nods, accepting that with another smile. This summer has been one vibrant and happy between them, knowing their daughter would soon join the ranks of young witches that would go on to do great things. She is powerful, raised by them after Will killed her father in a territorial dispute between their animal selves. They took her in as a child, showed her all the beautiful places in the world, and taught her how to hunt.

Will huffs in quiet complaint, nuzzling Hannibal's neck. "Freddie wears more and more perfume every year," he mutters, and licks over Hannibal's bared skin, tugging on his robes again. Though Will possesses human brain function when he's a dog, he has always been somewhat more animal than most men, the whole time Hannibal has known him. He smiles, and lets Will nuzzle and pet him, spreading his scent.

They freeze, at a quiet, timid knock on the door. Will's nostrils flare, and he smiles widely, shifting his weight from foot to foot since he cannot wag his tail. "Abigail!" he cries, and rushes to the door, opening it and grinning at their daughter. He picks her up, though she is much taller than when he would do it when she was a child. Still, Will is strong, and easily pulls her into a tight hug, letting her inside.

"Hello, darling," Hannibal says, and hugs her when Will releases her. She grins up at him, thumbing at the brim of her off-kilter witch's hat, and takes it off, plopping herself down on the big brown chair beside the fireplace. Winston, Will's dog, woofs once in greeting, his tail wagging, but doesn't rise. Lazy boy. "You should be in your dormitory, Abigail."

She sighs, biting her lower lip, and thumbs again at the brim of her hat. "I know, but I asked Miss Bev if I could take a look around and she said it was okay as long as I was back by lights out."

Will nods, and eyes the window. It is still, technically, before that – students are to be in their dormitories no later than an hour past nightfall. The days will grow shorter soon.

Then, Will frowns, and scents the air, approaching their daughter and crouching down in front of her. He rests his hands on her knees and sets his chin on them, smiling when she pets through his hair, and looks up at her with gentle eyes. "I know it's an adjustment," he says, "but if you make sure Bev knows where you are, you can come hang out with me whenever you're not in class."

She nods, but remains silent.

Hannibal tilts his head, and comes to stand beside the chair. He reaches down and tucks her hair behind her ear. "What's the matter, darling?" he asks her.

She presses her lips together, and looks up at him. "I know it's stupid," she says, "but I wanted to be in your house. Not Slytherin."

"There's nothing wrong with being a Slytherin," Hannibal replies mildly. "Some very great names have come from that house."

"Yeah," she mutters, "but I've heard the stories. It's got a bad name."

Will swallows, his jaw tight, and he rises and goes to the little kitchenette in his home, filling an iron kettle with water and placing it over a flame, which he conjures with a wave of his hand. "Then perhaps," Hannibal says slowly, "it's due for a change in reputation. You might become the first of that house to achieve greatness for something other than dark magic."

"I don't want to be a Slytherin!" Abigail says.

"Darling, the Sorting Hat is rarely wrong. It judges what you hold valuable, what drives and excites you, and places you in the house that will encourage those traits. Being a Slytherin doesn't mean being evil – simply ambitious, or cunning. Not inherently bad things."

Will snorts; a rather ugly noise. "The only difference between Gryffindor and Slytherin is P.R.," he says darkly. "You tell someone they're a monster, that they're evil and cruel, the fuck you expect them to become?"

"Will," Hannibal warns. Will rolls his shoulders, growling to himself, and lifts the kettle when it starts to whine. He pours Abigail a mug of tea, crisp and lemony, and brings it to her, handing it to her. She takes it with both hands and looks up at Will with her big, glassy eyes.

"Are you alright, daddy?"

Will hums, rolling his shoulders again, and forces a tight smile. "I'm fine, baby. I'm sorry – I'm not mad at you. I didn't mean to snap."

Abigail blinks at him.

"I think I'm gonna take Winston for a run," Will says, and smiles at her again. He leans down and kisses her hair, nuzzling her forehead. "Make sure your father takes you back to the castle before nightfall. We don't wanna get on Miss Bev's bad side."

They share a conspiratorial grin, and Will turns, clicking his tongue. Winston rises, tail wagging, and Hannibal opens the door as Will changes shape again, becoming that big, grey, wolf-like dog. They bolt out of the door and towards the forest.

He closes the door once the dogs are out of sight, and sighs.

"I made him mad," Abigail says quietly.

Hannibal shakes his head, and smiles at her, returning to her side. "No, darling, I swear, it's not about you," he murmurs, petting over her sleek hair as she sips at her tea. "His relationship with this place is…complicated."

She hums. "I still don't want to be a Slytherin," she mumbles.

"Why not?" Hannibal asks with a small smile.

She shrugs.

"Do you think they're really all evil? I saw you speaking with some of the second years. Have they been unkind to you?"

"No, of course not."

"Do you think every Slytherin grows up to be evil, just as every Ravenclaw must go on to subjects of study, and every Hufflepuff becomes a gardener, and every Gryffindor becomes a dragon trainer? Of course not."

"Still."

Hannibal sighs. He doesn't know if Will might scold him for sharing this, but; "Do you think your father is evil, Abigail?"

"What? No! Of course not!" she replies, staring up at him.

"He was a Slytherin, when he attended this school." Of course, given that they are both fierce predators, and hunters, and have earned quiet a reputation only she is privy to – famous, of course, but no one knows their names alongside it – he never believed for a second that it was because of the houses they were sorted into.

No, that particular prophecy started long before either of them were born.

She blinks up at him, and stares, shocked. "He was?" she asks, her brows drawing down harshly over her eyes as she frowns.

Hannibal nods, and gives her another smile, tucking her hair behind her ear again. He will have to teach her how to braid her own hair, if she wants to keep it out of her face. "He was," he confirms. "And he has gone on to start no war, to slaughter no innocents. He is a good man, wouldn't you agree?"

"Of course," she says with a vehement nod.

"Then there you have it. Not every snake is a monster, my dear. Only the ones that get stepped on, or baited, turn into the ones that bite."

She does not smile, but seems much more relaxed, and finishes her tea.

"Come now," Hannibal says, and stands, holding his hand out. She takes it, and leaves her empty mug on the little table by the chair. "I must make sure you're back in the castle before Miss Katz comes looking. We wouldn't want to get your father in trouble." She nods, and follows him out of the house, up the winding path towards the school. "And I'll hear no more talk of evil and monsters, except the ones you learn about in your studies, is that clear?"

"Yes, papa, I'm sorry. Will you tell him I'm sorry?" she asks, and sounds so young, so small. Hannibal forgets, sometimes, how truly much of a child she still is. "I don't want him to be mad at me."

"I assure you, darling, he could never be angry with you. As I said, he has a complicated past with this place." He leads her into the courtyard, towards the hall that leads to the Slytherin common rooms underground. He crouches down, and takes both her hands in his, smiling at her. "And no more sneaking off, understand? This place is much safer than when I was a boy, but there are still little tricks to it that you don't know yet. I don't want you getting hurt."

"Okay, I promise, no more sneaking off," she says, but she is grinning in that way children do when they don't quite know how to lie to the person who taught them how to lie. Hannibal smiles at her, and kisses her hair, straightening up after another quick hug.

"Run along now, and don't worry about your father. I'll see you for potions class."

"Okay!" She turns around, hurrying away, and Hannibal watches before she turns the corner. He leaves the hallway and returns to Will's house, finds that neither he nor Winston are inside it. He sighs, and pulls his robes more tightly around his shoulders, his eyes on the ground until he spots Will's tracks in the wet mud.

He smiles. After so many years, he knows nothing puts Will in a better humor than a good hunt.

He finds Will in a dark part of the forest, the big dog panting and resting by a large, clear lake. Near him, Winston rests, tearing into a rabbit carcass, and on his other side stands another beast. It is like a horse, but skeletal and winged – a thestral. Only visible by those who have seen a violent death – and, well, he and Will have seen their fair share.

He approaches the animals, and Will's ears perk up, he looks over his shoulder and his tail gives a single wag, thumping heavy against the ground in greeting. The thestral tosses its head and snorts, trotting away, and Hannibal takes the place it was standing, and sits, close enough to feel the chill coming from the water, and strokes over Will's large, smooth head, between his ears where he knows Will likes to be petted.

Will huffs, tucks his nose under Hannibal's thigh, his ears flat to his skull. He whines.

"I know, my love. She's not upset with you anymore, nor about being sorted into Slytherin." Will licks his jaws, huffs again. "She thinks you're mad at her."

Will growls.

"Perhaps on the weekend, we can take her fishing on the lake. I think that would make her happy."

Will blinks at him with one big, icy-blue eye. He huffs again.

Hannibal sighs. "You're right, of course," he murmurs. They made the decision, as a family, to keep Abigail's last name by birth when they raised her, and vowed that they would keep the details of their family unit secret when she attended school. Only half the faculty even know Will and Hannibal are married, and only Beverly and Jack know that Abigail is their daughter. It's easier that way.

So to do something as public as going fishing together with a student would not be keeping that secret.

He scratches Will behind the ear, making him grin and wag his tail again. It is a great feat of magic, but one they created when they were young – when Will is an animal, impressions of his thoughts and feelings can travel to Hannibal when they're touching. Hannibal sees, faint, like watching with wrong-prescription glasses, an image of Hannibal and Abigail on one of

the thestrals, or a hippogriff if one of them likes her, Will running below them and raising a howl, prompting the other wolves to chase.

Will doesn't like flying, but he likes running. Hannibal smiles.

"Yes," he says, and rubs his fingers gently through Will's scruff. "I think we can manage that."

Will smiles at him, and lifts his chin, resting it on Hannibal's thigh. His tail wags again, and he gives Hannibal a push of golden light – happiness, contentment. Hannibal smiles back, and leans down to kiss his soft forehead.

Will rolls onto his side, shoves his shoulders against Hannibal's hip, and sighs heavily. Hannibal doesn't need a lot of sleep, and he is not tired, so he moves to lie down on his side, his head on Will's thick scruff, and smiles when Will lets out a quiet, happy rumble. He closes his eyes, gold and soft blue shimmering like wisps of clouds behind his lids as Will pushes his contentment and joy to him, and settles, happy to wait until Will is ready to go home.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

> It's a struggle to want to maintain their age difference but also put them in school at the same time where it's not, like, underage, y'know? I headcanon that Will is born early in the year so that he's a sixth year when Hannibal's a seventh but they're both 17/18 when they do nsfw stuff.
>
> Also, again, I hate writing prophecies.

"Hey, Graham, wait up!"

Will rolls his eyes, blowing out a heavy breath as, at his side, Beverly appears in a swirl of robes, her cheeks flushed in the humid air, her tie askew and the knot falling about a foot down her chest, her collar open. "What's up?" he asks, shifting his heavy 'Care of Magical Creatures' book to his other side, because the way she's shoving at him is putting him in dire threat of dropping it.

Beverly grins at him, toothy and bright. "A little birdie told me you were gonna try out for the Quidditch team!" she says, and Will winces, blowing out another breath. Goddamn it, he's never telling Randall *anything* again. The kid is nice enough, a first year, Will in his sixth, but he follows Will around like a Goddamn puppy, and they're not even in the same *house*. But he likes talking with Will about their herbology and magical creatures lessons, and Will likes talking about animals too.

It had been a minor slip, just one off-hand comment, but Randall soaks up Will's words like a sponge. And, of course, he'd tell Beverly if she asked.

She puffs out a breath, blowing her hair back from her face, and gives Will a very sharp-looking side-eye. "So," she says, stretching out the word far too long, her brows lifting expectantly. "What changed your mind? I distinctly remember you calling the Slytherin captain a…what did you call him?" She drums her finger against her chin.

"A spoiled little bitch who wouldn't know what to do with a broom if I shoved it up his ass?" Will offers.

She grins. "Right!" She snaps her fingers together. "So either you and he are now best friends forever, which means I have to fight someone to keep my top rank, or something else changed your mind."

Will flushes, and rolls his eyes again. He looks down at the purring book in his hand, stroking idly along the spine until the many eyes blink, flatten, and the little tentacle-like whiskers

settle. "Maybe I just want to broaden my horizons," Will says lightly, knowing as soon as he says it that she won't believe him for a moment. "It looks like a fun enough game – I can deal with a few spoiled brats for the sake of it, if I like it."

"Mhm." Beverly fixes him with a look, and Will sighs, turning from the courtyard entrance and down the hallway, towards the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom. One of his favorites, except the teacher – he doesn't like Professor Brown. He always stares a little too long at Will. But Will is good at those classes, and he enjoys the material. Just like he might enjoy Quidditch, if he got to play.

Beverly follows him, even though Will knows they don't have this class together, and purses her lips. "This wouldn't have anything at all to do with the fact that Hannibal was just made Ravenclaw captain, would it?"

Will winces, and blushes deeply, and she lets out a crow of delight.

"I swear, Will, your crush can be seen from the other side of the world! Why don't you just *talk* to him?"

Will presses his lips together. In truth, he and Hannibal do talk – they talk a lot. And sometimes they barely talk at all; just stare up at the sky together and pass conversation about anything that strikes their fancy. But becoming captain means that Hannibal has to dedicate himself to every practice, every drill, and every match, and Will isn't *jealous*, of course not, but he has the free time, and if it means spending more time with Hannibal while they train and play together, what's the harm?

"He doesn't want to talk to me," Will lies, and she rolls her eyes at him. "Come on, Beverly, just leave it alone. Let me mope and pine in peace."

She lets out a noise that is half annoyed, half a shriek of glee. "Maybe I should talk to him!" Will's eyes widen, and he stares at her in horror. "I think he likes me – he always smiles at me when we pass each other in the hallway. And I'm a Ravenclaw too, after all." She tosses her tie over her shoulder, as if Will could forget their separate houses.

"Please, I am begging you, if you love me at all, you won't do that," Will says, mortified – he couldn't imagine Hannibal's reaction if Beverly tried to approach Hannibal and sweettalk him into paying more attention to Will. Hannibal is in his seventh year, so they don't have any classes together, but that's probably for the best because Will can hardly concentrate when they're in the same room. When they sit in the Great Hall, eating or studying or writing their essays, feeling Hannibal's eyes on him is like a brand he can't shake.

She hums, and he halts in place, turns and grabs her arm. "*Please*, Beverly, don't," he implores her, shaking his head. "If it gets you to shut up, I'll talk to him myself. I don't want you doing that for me. *Please*."

"Fine, fine!" she says, and brushes his hand away. She grins at him. "I knew you'd see it my way. So I guess I'll see you when you're on the team! Tryouts are today, right?" Will nods, sighing. "I'll come give my support. What position are you going for?"

He shrugs. "I think they need a new Beater," Will says. One of the last ones had gotten a mean hit from a bludger and had been in the hospital wing for a week already. Will doesn't remember his name. "But whatever, honestly, I don't care."

"Mm, because you'd rather *beat* something else, huh?" she says with a lecherous smile. Will doesn't know whether he'd rather laugh or glare at her. He settles for glaring. She tugs on his tie with an affectionate smile. "Well, good luck, break a leg! Actually, no, don't break a leg. You know what I mean."

She gives him a wave, and turns away, and Will sighs again, running a hand through his hair, and turns to go to class.

"Good morning everyone, I'm glad to see you all navigated your way here safely."

Hannibal smiles as he strides into his class, through the middle rows of tables, where cauldrons are sitting above small Bunsen burners, though they are not lit yet, and there are no contents to boil. A chorus of 'Good morning, Professor's rise up from the wide-eyed first years. Hannibal notes Abigail, front and right, next to Marissa. Abigail gives him a small smile as he turns at the front of the class, and rests against the edge of his desk.

"My name is Hannibal Lecter, and for those of you who don't know me yet, I am the Potions Master here, as well as Head of Ravenclaw house. I encourage you to consider me as not just a teacher, but someone you can come to with any concerns during your time here. My office has a letterbox on the outside of it, and even if I am not there, I am alerted when a letter is posted, so I will be able to come to you when I am able." He gives them all a kind smile.

He receives a wave of nods, and gestures with his wand, so that the stack of books on the end of his desk all lift, one going to a student each. "The curriculum asks you all to have 'Introduction to Potions', but I will be using material from this book as well," he says, taking the last once every student has a copy. "It contains history, etymology, and instructions on caring for all the ingredients we will be covering during the year. I encourage you to read it if it's something that interests you; though most ingredients can be purchased from magical marketplaces, I've found the best herbs are the ones you care for yourself."

At the front of a class, a young Gryffindor raises her hand. She's a redhead, her hair a thick mane reminiscent of Freddie's, and blinks at him with big brown eyes when he nods to her. "Yes, a question?"

She lowers her hand again. "I saw on the curriculum notes that we'll be covering sleeping draughts," she says, and he nods to her. "I read the ingredients list, and saw it contains Valerian. I'm allergic to that – I can't touch it."

Hannibal gives her a reassuring smile. "All practical potion-making in my class will be done in pairs. We'll be certain your partner knows that. Do you have any trouble with the fumes, or

being around it?" She shakes her head. "Good. I'll be certain to remember that for any demonstrations, thank you for telling me."

She smiles at him, and Hannibal makes a mental note to pair her with Abigail, when the time comes – Abigail will remember, and be conscious of the girl's limitations. One mustn't run the risk of poisoning one's food, after all.

Not that he would eat a child, but it's a sentiment he and Will passed onto Abigail, and who knows who she might pay attention to.

"Are there any other allergies or restrictions I need to be aware of?" he asks the class at large, and smiles when they shake their heads. "Good. Open your Introduction books to the Foreword and read over it while I write out our first recipe."

They obey, and Hannibal turns to the chalkboard, grabbing a fresh stick of chalk and writing out the ingredients to the beginner's antidote. "First, before you learn how to make anything, you must be able to make a capable antidote – potions are tricky things, and can easily make you sick if incorrectly made. Learning to make an antidote will save you from a lot of uncomfortable situations."

He hears, behind him, a small displacement of air, a susurrus passing through the students as they become aware of something. He turns, and smiles when he sees, passing through the door, two shadows. First, Winston, panting and trotting around to the front of the desks. Will strides down the center as Hannibal did, his wolfdog form large enough that his shoulders crest the top of the tables. His jaws are parted, tongue lolling out, and he steps up to the side of Hannibal's desk, and sits down, ears perked forward. He licks his maw and gazes on the first-years, and Hannibal knows he is mentally filing away their faces and scents, so that he knows them as he does with every student that passes through the grounds.

This is a practical thing, as well as something Will simply does; if a student is lost, or wanders off, Will can find them much faster in his dog form, and if he knows their scents.

Hannibal lifts his chin, smelling a soft flood of nervousness, intrigue – Abigail's bright joy, a high note amidst the rest. He smiles, and goes to Will's side. He does not pet Will in front of people – he doesn't want to give the impression that Will is simply an animal to play with and croon over.

"I'm sure you remember, from your first day here," Hannibal says. "This is Will. He's the groundskeeper here, and an Animagus. You'll cover those in your transfiguration and Dark Arts lessons, though an Animagus is not dark magic." He tilts his head, and, curious, says; "Is anyone familiar with animagi?"

A few hands shoot up, and he nods to a Hufflepuff sitting towards the back. "An Animagus is someone who can shift from a person to an animal at will," the boy says brightly, and at his side, Will grins, and huffs a pleased noise.

Hannibal nods. "That is correct. An Animagus is a witch or wizard with the rare ability to transform into a particular animal at will. The Animagus spell is very difficult and dangerous

to perform, which is one reason that all Animagi are required to be registered by the Ministry of Magic."

Beside him, Will huffs again. Hannibal smiles down at him.

Winston yawns loudly, ears pulling back, and he curls up beside the desk, his nose buried in his forelegs. "And this is Winston," Hannibal adds, gesturing to the dog. "He's Will's dog, not an Animagus. He's very friendly, feel free to give him all the attention you desire."

The students grin.

"But," he adds meaningfully, "not during my class. Will, do you have everything you need?"

Will stands, shaking out his pelt, and goes in front of the first bench, passing along the students' feet with his nose lowered, breathing in deeply. "Don't be alarmed," Hannibal says, as some of the students pull their feet back, out of the way. "He needs to learn your scents – that way, if anyone gets lost, or needs to be located quickly, he will be able to find you."

Will sweeps between each row, and when he's done, he turns and lets out a soft woof, summoning Winston. Winston rises, tail wagging, and darts out of the room, and Will follows after with one last look towards Hannibal, his tail swishing gently from side to side as they leave.

Hannibal smiles, and turns back towards the board. "Where were we? Ah, yes, antidotes. Please, continue your reading, and then we'll begin."

Will is sitting in the astronomy tower, past lights out, when he hears the door open, and turns. He smiles, flushing darkly when he sees it's Hannibal, the soft candlelight making him look golden and fine, as he enters and closes the door behind him.

"Hey," he greets, and shifts in place, making more room on the wide stone edge of the window. Hannibal climbs over it, sighing, and tugs on the knot of his tie. He is always impeccably adherent to the uniform code, keeps his tie tight and his collar done up all the way. Only Will sees him in any kind of slouch and down-dress.

He looks tired; there are dark circles under his eyes, but his gaze is bright as he joins Will in looking up at the full moon, the pinpricks of stars. Will sighs, and leans against him, cheek to the soft cloth of his black robe.

Their fingers lace on Will's thigh, squeezing gently.

"Beverly spoke to me today."

Will hisses a breath. "Fuck. I told her not to."

Hannibal squeezes his fingers, lets out a quiet, amused noise. "Why?"

"Because I don't need her sticking her nose in my business. In *our* business."

Hannibal laughs. "Perhaps I'm misunderstanding – she simply wished to congratulate me on the acquisition of a new seeker." Will bites his lower lip, and blushes further. "I saw you during tryouts. Your captain is a fool not to have chosen you."

Will hums, and shrugs. "I'm not that torn up about it," he says, though he can't quite hide the bitterness from his voice. Yes, he didn't make the team, and honestly he couldn't care less, but it just means he's not going to be able to spend as much time with Hannibal as he could be, had he made it.

Hannibal is quiet for a moment. Then; "I was under the impression you didn't care much for the game."

"I don't," Will replies. Breathes, very softly; "I care for you."

Hannibal nods, and turns his head, nuzzling Will's messy hair. "I'm sorry it pulls me away so often. Had I the choice, I would much rather spend time with you."

Will smiles. "Can't let the house down," he replies, and Hannibal huffs again. Will lifts his head, meets Hannibal's eyes, and cups his warm cheek. "I know you're tired," he murmurs. "Thanks for coming to see me anyway."

Hannibal's smile widens. Given that they are in different houses, and different years, it's the truth that they can only spend time together so infrequently – hiding away in abandoned rooms at night or sneaking off to be with each other the rare times they both have a free period.

Hannibal leans in, touches their foreheads together, and covers Will's hand with his other, squeezing his fingers lightly. He breathes out. "I fear, at the end of this year, we will have to make do with further separation, until you graduate as well."

Will swallows. He doesn't want to think about that.

"I want to tell you -." Hannibal stops, opens his eyes, and presses his lips together. "My home is in France, and my uncle is hardly ever there. If you wanted to visit me, during the holidays, perhaps…"

Will's eyes widen. He tightens his hands, and nods vigorously. "I want to," he breathes. "Yes. Hell, I'll visit every damn night if I can get away with it." If he has to steal floo powder or make his own damn illegal portkey, he will do it.

Hannibal blinks at him, as though shocked by Will's eagerness, but his smile is wide, and dazzling. The sound he lets out is like a purring wildcat. "I'd like that very much, Will," he breathes, and lets go of Will's hand, to brush his thumb along the corner of Will's mouth. "I know people say we are young, and that young love is, by its nature, too passionate to last, and too fleeting to be called real, but what I feel for you is…"

Will understands. It's deeper than love, he thinks. He doesn't know the word for it, but he knows – he knew from the second their eyes met in the Great Hall, and he remembers thinking, begging the Sorting Hat; *'Please, please put me with him*'. It was not to be, but that hasn't stopped them.

"I feel the same," he breathes, if only to see Hannibal smiling like that. It lights him up, makes him feel wild and reckless, makes him want to shed his skin and howl. He leans in, pulls Hannibal to him, and shivers when their lips brush. Hannibal slides his hand to Will's neck, cradling gently, and the warmth of his mouth is better than any food, drink, or magic Will has ever felt.

"Let's save the future for when it comes," Hannibal says, when they part for air. "For now, I simply want to be with you."

Will smiles, and nods. He kisses Hannibal one more time, chaste and long, and then puts his cheek on Hannibal's shoulder, nuzzling like dogs do, and they settle together with quiet sighs, and turn their eyes up to the moon.

Stretching out before them, the Forbidden Forest whispers and creaks, the Whomping Willow stretches its bows, and for the rest, it is silent. Like all of eternity is holding its breath.

Be careful the ice does not thaw,
Nor the flames become too low.
If one should perish, the other wilt,
Fate's river will cease its flow.
Two souls, conjoined, will never part,
Ice and Fire: they see. They know.

Chapter 3

Will lifts his head, grinning when he spies the cluster of Ravenclaws as they emerge from the changing rooms between the Quidditch pitch and the open field beyond the arena. Hannibal leads the pack, his face flushed from sweating during practice, his hair windswept back from his face. Their eyes meet, and Hannibal's gaze sharpens, his lips turn up in an involuntary smile. He nods to his fellow Ravenclaws and parts from them, hands his broom off to a second-year Will doesn't know, but who takes the broom like he's been given the Holy Grail, and Hannibal rolls his shoulders, waits until they disperse as they desire, and then he turns and strides swiftly over to Will.

Will tilts his head up. It's a warm day, bright with sunlight, and he had chosen to sit in the grass with Winston at his side – the dog has not aged a day since Will found him wandering the Forbidden Forest, and either the faculty don't know Will keeps him, or they don't care. There seem to be a lot of rules and regulations Will is exempt from when it comes to safety.

"Hello, Will," Hannibal breathes, and sits down next to him with a heavy sigh. He looks tired, spent from practice, the collar of his uniform shirt – changed into, his sports gear likely magicked away to the laundry to be washed – damp with sweat. Will smiles, leaning into him, and nudges his nose briefly against Hannibal's shoulder. Hannibal smiles at him, lifts his eyes to make sure they are alone, and cups Will's face, stealing a single kiss.

Will sighs, but keeps his lips closed, and Hannibal parts from him, raising a brow. "Are you alright?"

Will nods, pushes the mandrake leaf sitting on his tongue to the other side of his teeth, and sticks his tongue out to show the stain of yellow-ish green to Hannibal. Hannibal's head tilts. "It tastes awful," Will explains. "I wouldn't subject you to that."

"I'll pretend I know what you're talking about."

Will grins at him, and opens his Transfiguration book, showing Hannibal the page he was studying. Hannibal tilts his head, and takes it from him, and lets out a quiet sound of amusement. "Animagi?"

Will nods. "The spell itself is simple enough, it's just time-consuming, and you can get a lot wrong, so a lot of people don't try it." It's hard to speak with the mandrake leaf in his mouth – he must be sure not to crush or swallow it accidentally, or else he'll have to wait until the full moon and start all over again.

Hannibal's lips purse. "You want to perform it on yourself?" he asks, and meets Will's eyes when Will nods again. "Why?"

Will lifts a shoulder. "Kind of just to see if I can. A lot because people don't watch animals like they watch humans." He drops his hand, idly stroking through Winston's scruff. The dog yawns, tail swishing back and forth, once, and looks up at Will with big brown eyes. Will

sighs. "I want to be able to disappear. *Really* disappear, if I have to. Even dementors can't tell an animal from an Animagus, or so I've heard." He shrugs again.

"An Animagus is required to be registered with the Ministry," Hannibal says, half a warning, though he's sure Will already knows. "If you do this, once you come of age, you'll have to register. Then it won't matter if they're watching you or not."

Will presses his lips together, something sour and bitter stirring in his stomach that has nothing to do with the foul-tasting leaf in his mouth. He meets Hannibal's eyes. "It's amazing what the Ministry will let you get away with when they think they can keep tabs on you," he murmurs.

Hannibal blinks at him, and then he sighs, closing the book. "You spoke with Professor Crawford."

"Do you believe it?" Will whispers. He puts his other hand over Hannibal's, where it rests on his book, and laces their fingers together. "I can't believe it, not for a second. But he does – I know he does, every time he looks at me it's like he expects me to start throwing Unforgiveable Curses at him."

Hannibal presses his lips together, his eyes dark as he looks down at their interlaced hands. "I don't believe it," he replies, and meets Will's eyes. "I believe that we are masters of our own destiny, and prophecies are, by their nature, vague." His lips twitch. "Like horoscopes. Catering to the suspicious and those prone to flights of fancy."

Will snorts, but he's smiling. "You think Professor Crawford is prone to flights of fancy?" he teases.

"Perhaps not, but he's a naturally suspicious man, and is old enough to know stories of the first dark lord. I can imagine he'd be keeping a close lookout for the second one."

Will frowns. "I'm not evil," he says sharply.

"Of course not," Hannibal replies easily. He lifts Will's hand, and kisses his knuckles, his eyes brightening with amusement. "Intelligent, yes; cunning, and ruthless, and utterly cruel, absolutely. But evil? No."

Will laughs, startled. "Cruel?"

"Mercilessly," Hannibal purrs, his smile widening in the face of Will's humor. "I see you everywhere on the grounds, driving me to distraction." Will bites his lower lip, blushing, and swallows, carefully pressing the mandrake leaf to the roof of his mouth so he doesn't damage it. "And when I cannot see you, you linger in my thoughts."

Will's blush darkens, and he shifts his weight, unable to stop himself smiling wide, ducking his head coyly. He squeezes Hannibal's hand. "If it's any consolation, you do the same to me," he admits. It's always been that way, from the moment Will met Hannibal's eyes. Call it the red string of fate, call it powerful chemistry, call it whatever you will, but Will met Hannibal and has had eyes, breath, heart for no other, and he doubts he ever will.

Hannibal sighs, smiling, and his eyes drop to Will's lips. "Cruel boy," he murmurs. "How much longer do you need to deny me your kiss?"

Will winces, pressing his lips together. "The spell requires the witch or wizard to keep the leaf in their mouth for a whole month, according to the instructions," he says. "Full moon to full moon." Hannibal blinks at him, as though startled by the length, and Will grins. "Told you it's a lot."

Hannibal nods, and opens the book again, turning to the page for the Animagus spell. "You'll need a Death's-head hawk moth," he murmurs.

Will nods. "Eventually."

"Do you intend to raid the gardens for one? They are quite hard to come by. I don't think any live on the school grounds."

Will shrugs. "I'll figure it out," he says. He's not worried. Between his friends in Herbology who helped him get the mandrake leaf in the first place, and Beverly who seems to know everyone's schedules, and his own wandering around the Forbidden Forest and school grounds, he's sure he'll manage to find one. If not here, then during the break – he timed it perfectly so that he'd be able to go to Hogsmeade or Diagon Alley without explaining to a teacher where he was going or why.

Though with Professor Crawford breathing down his neck, Will knows it won't be as easy as if he were anyone else.

Hannibal makes a quiet noise, closes the book and gives it back to Will. "Well, let me know if you need any assistance," he says with a warm smile.

Will nods, and sighs, lacing their fingers together again. They remain like that, silent and still, letting the sun warm them and the light breeze bring them the scent of coming rain.

Though Hannibal has quarters in the school where he can sleep, he spends most of his nights in Will's little hut on the edge of the forest, much preferring the company of his husband to the high ceilings and lofty halls. They remind him a lot of his childhood home, but not in a particularly pleasant way – he learned early on that even the strongest castles can fall.

Will lights the fire with a wave of his hand, smiling when the flames jump up and crackle happily. Will has a wand, as all witches and wizards do, but he is one of the few Hannibal has ever met who can easily perform wandless magic. Will has always been powerful, indescribably so; it's one of the things that kept him under such careful watch when they were younger.

He sighs, stretches his arms above his head, and goes to Hannibal, happily curling up at his side on the small couch tucked into the corner of his hut. Winston finds the halo of the fire

and plops down, rolling onto his flank so his belly can be warmed by the flames.

Will shivers, tucking his nose to Hannibal's neck as Hannibal embraces him. "Do you think we made the right choice?" he murmurs.

Hannibal's head tilts, and Will pushes himself upright so they can see each other.

"Sending her here. We could have just put her in normal school, taught her magic on the side."

Hannibal smiles. "If she were to practice magic, underage, it would draw the Ministry's attention," he replies kindly, petting through Will's hair. Given Will's history with this place, he's not surprised by Will's reluctance to send their daughter here. "She would be quickly found and placed here anyway. At least, this way, we control the means and discovery of her lineage, should anyone ask."

Will's brow creases, and he sighs – unhappy but reluctantly nodding. "I guess," he murmurs. "But there's no real point, is there? People can learn magic any kind of way – Hell, even muggles have some intuition for it."

"We can keep an eye on her, here," Hannibal reasons gently.

Will sighs again, running a hand through his hair. He settles on his haunches, heels tucked to the edge of the couch, and curls his fingers around each other, biting his lower lip. His eyes are dark, settled on the door.

"I don't want Crawford looking at her like he looked at me," he finally says, quiet and low. His upper lip twitches, revealing the edge of his teeth. "I know he still…thinks…"

"Don't you think time has tempered his obsession with that silly prophecy?" Hannibal asks. He doesn't mean to sound scolding, but it must come out that way, because Will winces, clenching his jaw. "My love, at first he thought *I* was this fabled dark lord that would destroy the world. Then he thought it was you. Who knows how many others have passed through his radar and been similarly discarded."

"Not to put too fine a point on it, but he wasn't exactly wrong," Will replies. "We've done bad things."

"Hardly the same as mass genocide and eugenics," Hannibal says.

Will huffs. "I don't like being here, Hannibal," he murmurs. "I know I must, just as you must – this is your job, and I would never be parted from you if I could. But I don't like hiding. I don't like hiding my love for you, or for Abigail. I never have."

"I know, darling," Hannibal replies, petting through Will's wild hair. "You are a passionate creature, and that passion seeks an outlet. It's one of the things I so dearly love about you." Will's jaw unclenches, at that, and he gives Hannibal a sweet, warm smile. "Though, now that you mention it, I have been considering changing my role for some time."

Will's head tilts.

"I recently learned that Jack's wife is very sick – a cancer that cannot be cured through medicine or magic. I wouldn't think it impossible that he might consider retiring, so that they might be able to travel during her final months."

Will blinks at him, frowning.

"Are you going to go for his job?" he asks.

"I'm the longest-standing member of the faculty, currently, and have a reputation as a fair and capable teacher. Do you think he would consider someone else over me?"

"I don't think he'd consider you at all, if he still cares about this prophecy," Will replies. "If he thought you were an evil man, or, I mean -. He knows we're married." He lifts his shoulders in a shrug. "He wouldn't want to put either of us in a position of power, especially if he wasn't here to keep an eye on us."

Hannibal smiles at Will's tone. "I can be very persuasive," he purrs, scratching his nails over Will's scalp until his eyelids droop, his lips part. Will shifts his weight, turning into him again, cheek on Hannibal's shoulder. "And I have friends who will support my claim. What do you think? If I were to get the job?"

"I think it's a step closer to Minister," Will says softly.

Hannibal grins. "Exactly."

"You can't hide from me – play coy all you want. You've had your eyes on that position as long as I've known you." He doesn't sound upset by it – like he said, Will knows Hannibal has always had a terribly honed sense of ambition. He deliberately put himself in Ravenclaw house; he kept his nose clean and under the radar, so no one looked at him too closely. They say history must be learned from, or those in the present will be doomed to repeat it – Hannibal is far too clever to be that obvious about it.

Will lifts his head. "If you want it, I'll support you, of course," he murmurs, and gently touches Hannibal's cheek. "But you must be careful. We have a powerful hand, and must keep our cards close."

Hannibal smiles, and kisses Will deeply. "Of course, my love, I submit myself to your greater wisdom on the matter." Will snorts, ungraciously, and rolls his eyes, but he is finally smiling again, and he kisses Hannibal with that same passion Hannibal has always known him for. Together, lit only by firelight, they are two monsters in their den, warm and content.

Monsters that know how to play the game.

When Abigail is in her fourth year, Hannibal gets his wish, and takes his seat in the Headmaster's chair at the head of the table before the Sorting ceremony. He knows all the

speeches, knows how to give a warm welcome. Freddie is a vibrating pillar of outrage beside him – she had tried to get the Headmaster's seat as well.

"I know we will all miss Headmaster Crawford dearly – he was a strong pillar within this community, and the magical world at large. I will do my best to fill his shoes and lead you all through your classes, and please know that there is no task too small, no concern too trifling, to bring to me."

The students and staff clap, Abigail and Beverly the loudest. At the end of the table, Will sits in his dog form, and barks happily, tail wagging wildly. He grins at Hannibal, an eager light in his eyes, and Hannibal smiles back at him, and sits once more.

Within a throne of gold and steel
The Dark Lord sits, the subjects kneel.
They cry and cheer, one voice to hear,
And bow their heads with eager ear.
The boy of fire, standing tall
Will be the one to lead the call.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

please note the new tags and rating!

"For years, we have existed in a secret, stable peace. But that peaceful life is a solitary one – witches and wizards cannot afford to resist integration any longer. Grindelwald and Voldemort were two examples of a terrible manifestation of our racism towards muggles. The world is changing – there is more magic blood being spread through all kinds of communities who don't have access to the schools and establishments we have clung to for so long.

I'm not asking you to break the wheel overnight. The fact of the matter is, however, that this system we have will no longer suffice."

"Miss Hobbs." The speaker is a kindly-looking man, with a sharp face and a very specific condescension in his voice; "You speak passionately. That's admirable, and understandable given your youth. But what you're suggesting goes against all tradition."

Abigail swallows, and lifts her eyes. She receives an encouraging nod from the Minister, and rolls her shoulders. "With all due respect, Mister Dimmond, screw tradition." A series of uncomfortable and shocked murmurs meets her statement. The Minister is smiling. "Do you really think we're stronger just because we have magic?"

"It's the truth," Mister Dimmond says.

"Oh, really?" Abigail snaps, and gestures with her wand. A screen appears behind her, like a projector, and on it manifests an image of none other than Lord Voldemort. The scent of fear is suddenly so strong, the sheep quivering at the memory of the wolf. "Even with all our magic, the death toll from this monster was in the thousands. How long does it take you to utter a curse, or cast a spell? A few minutes? Maybe less if you're really good at it.

You know how long it takes to fire a gun? Milliseconds. Bullets travel faster, almost invisibly, and right now we have no magic wards to protect against them. My father taught me that. Muggles use these all the time – for defense, for hunting, even for killing each other if they have to."

She waves her wand again and the screen disappears.

"Muggles are evolving, and we must evolve with them," she insists. "Not to try and outdo them, or be their rivals, but to help each other – the crimes of Voldemort and Grindelwald would have been stopped in their tracks, no war, no senseless violence and deaths. New York

was turned into rubble. The final fight almost razed Hogwarts to the ground. What happens when the next big threat comes?

Or, not even that – what if the muggles need our help? How can they ask for help when they don't even know we exist? Non-pureblood unions are happening all over the world, and every day another child is born with the potential for powerful magic. If they are never taught and trained, we run the risk of drowning under the wave of half-formed magic-users who don't understand the powers they get."

Another susurrus. The Minister stands, and Abigail's eyes lift. She smiles at him, noting the pleasure and pride in his dark eyes. He raises a hand and calls the rabble to quiet.

"What are you suggesting, Miss Hobbs?" he asks.

She presses her lips together, takes a deep breath, and says; "I move to abolish the rules for monitoring and punishment for the use of underage magic." There is an outcry, but a look from the Minister quickly silences it. "Instead we should work with the muggle world leaders, and their communities, and implement magic education in every school. Even those who cannot practice it should know about it."

The Minister tilts his head, purses his lips, and casts his eyes around the room. "A daring motion, Miss Hobbs," he says with a nod. "And one that we will need to take some time for, to ensure thorough discussion."

She bows her head. "Thank you, Minister Lecter. My lords and ladies," she adds, nodding to the rest of the room. Then, she turns with a swirl of her long, dark hair, and walks out of the auditorium. Outside the room sit two dogs – one large, wolf-like, the other smaller and brindle. Abigail grins at them as the big one woofs at her, and they walk in single file down the hallway and out into the main thoroughfare.

Abigail sighs, and touches the pendant hanging around her neck, that her father made for her when she graduated, so that she can hear his thoughts when he's a dog. "Being in charge suits papa," she whispers to the pendant.

Behind her, the wolfdog barks a laugh. The pendant pulses with warmth and affection and she smiles. "How did it go?" her father's voice whispers to her across the bond.

"Well as it could have, I suppose," she replies internally, leading the way out of the Ministry headquarters. They emerge onto a sunny, well-lit street, the bustle of muggles and magic-users alike almost drowning out her father's next words;

"You made the motion to abolish underage monitoring?"

She nods again. "I know he's with me, and he can be persuasive." She grins over her shoulder at the two dogs. "The seed's been planted. Just have to watch it grow, now."

"Your father is the most talented man I know, when it comes to growing things out of nothing," Will tells her, his large maw spread wide in a grin. She smiles, and scratches at his scruff, making him rumble and lick his jaws. "Now, come – take out your wand."

She obeys, and they duck into an alleyway, the three of them. Will bites Winston's collar and Abigail touches his scruff, and waves her wand, letting the three of them aparate away, back home.

Hannibal lifts his head, straightening in eagerness when the fireplace flares with green light, and from the chimney breast there is a sharp *whoosh* of air, and then Will appears, coughing and dusting himself off. He's dressed casually, in jeans, boots, and a thick sweater, and his hair and cheeks are coated with ash.

He coughs again, and Hannibal rises from his chair, going to embrace him eagerly. He ignores the spread of black on Will's cheeks and neck, cradles his jaw and kisses him before Will can catch his breath. Will laughs, a startled and happy sound, clutching at Hannibal's shirt when they part.

"Finally," he mutters. "I ended up in three other villas in France before I got here. Luckily they were unoccupied."

Hannibal laughs. "Without the proper accent, one runs the risk of ending up all sorts of places," he says. Will only has a shoulder bag with him, which Hannibal takes from him as Will briskly brushes off the ash from his face and hair. Hannibal sets the bag down, takes his hand, and leads him to the kitchen so he can wash his face and hands.

Hannibal flattens himself to Will's back, unable to help himself, for he has missed Will dearly. "You'll be eighteen soon," he murmurs to Will's warm neck, smiling when Will shivers. "Then you will be able to aparate and move as you see fit."

Will nods, and turns his head, letting Hannibal kiss him again. He turns in Hannibal's arms and embraces him fiercely, both hands flat on Hannibal's back as Hannibal presses him to the kitchen counter. It is the winter break, and snow is falling outside, and they are the only ones in the world that matter.

Will swallows when they pull apart, licks his lips, tender and pink. "I missed you," he says, and the way he says it sounds like he's in pain, like there is nothing that matters to him except this – touching, feeling Hannibal's warmth against him. It's been several months since Will successfully performed the Animagus charm on himself, but his affection has always been canine; he seeks closeness, shared heat, rubbing cheeks and brushing jaws.

"And I missed you, Will, terribly so," Hannibal replies, and cups his face, damp now from water. He kisses Will deeply, sighs when Will eagerly answers him, parting his lips to allow Hannibal to taste; parting his thighs, to invite him closer.

Hannibal presses against him, sliding his free hand down Will's heaving flank, and smiles when Will whines, ends their kiss and gently butts his forehead against Hannibal's. "I don't want to think about school, or anything right now," he says. "I don't want to do anything except be lazy with you for the next two weeks."

"Of course," Hannibal murmurs, smiling widely. "My uncle was called to Russia for the winter; I doubt he will return any time soon." Will's eyes flash, and darken with anticipation. He licks his lips again. "It's just you and me here."

Will smiles, off-kilter and wide, dimpling his cheeks. "Well," he says softly, low, his hands petting idle down Hannibal's back until they rest on his hips. "We should take full advantage."

"I'll kill her – I swear to all that is holy I'll rip her Goddamn heart out through her fucking *teeth*."

Hannibal smiles, though it's a strained thing. He is as angry as Will is, and watches his mate pace around their little house, hackles raised and teeth bared in a snarl, and wishes he could join him, in his ire. Will is beautiful at all times, but when he's angry, his wrath is positively breathtaking.

"My love, Freddie is perfectly within her rights to deduct points from Abigail for breaking the rules," he says mildly. "It will teach her to be more aware of her actions."

"That little bitch deserved what he got," Will spits, whirling on Hannibal again. "That fuckin' *kid* put his hands on *our daughter* and *she's* the one being punished for retaliating?"

Hannibal swallows his own snarl. "We don't harm children, Will," he reminds him. Will knows that, though – it was one of his rules. "He grabbed her too hard, and now he knows she will bite back when provoked. We taught her to be strong and stand up for herself. She knows that the points deduction means nothing in the grand scheme of things."

Will hisses again.

"She put him in the hospital wing."

"Good," Will snaps. "If I had my way…"

Hannibal knows. If Will had his way, there would be more than a few broken bones and an impressive amount of bruising on the boy's body. He would, instead, be somewhere deep in the Forbidden Forest, never to be seen again.

Hannibal goes to him, taking Will by the hair, and brings his face to Hannibal's neck. Will breathes in deeply, vibrating with anger, but settles when Hannibal begins to pet him, scratching nails over Will's nape in a way he knows never fails to soothe his fiery mate.

"I hate this place, Hannibal," Will says, muffled against his neck. "I hate it here. Promise me once she graduates we'll never have to come back."

"I swear it, darling," Hannibal vows. "You know my ambition does not stop here."

Will huffs, and when he pulls back to meet Hannibal's eyes, he's smiling. "When you rule the world," he says quietly, and shakes his head with another small laugh.

"When *we* rule the world, my love," Hannibal corrects, gently brushing his knuckles over Will's scruffy jaw. Will raises his eyes, blinking in shock. "I know you have no desire to be in the public light, but your love, and your help, will be vital in the future. Yours and Abigail's – I could not be half the man I am without you."

Will's smile widens, and for a moment he looks seventeen again, brash and wild and reckless. He looks like the kind of creature men die trying to chase and conquer. By all that exists, Hannibal has no idea how he could love Will more, and then he smiles like that and it's like seeing him for the first time.

His breath catches, and he pulls Will against him, kissing him fiercely. "Would you like to pretend?" he whispers, watching as Will's eyes darken. His lips part, his shoulders roll, and when he slides against Hannibal there is something much more insistent in his eyes. "What if I brought Freddie Lounds to you, now, and knew we could do as we pleased without fear of consequence?"

Will snarls, and lunges for Hannibal, sending him onto the couch. Will climbs on top of him, runs his hands through Hannibal's hair, and growls into his next kiss; "I'd gut her." His hips roll, heavy and warm, and he groans as Hannibal drags his nails over Will's strong back. "But I'd do that last. I want her to suffer for all the shit she's ever put us through."

A tad dramatic, since Freddie has been little more than a mere annoyance to Hannibal – but Will loathes her, for reasons Hannibal might never truly know all the details of. It's enough for him, though, for Will burns with anger and wrath, kisses Hannibal with teeth, and snarls when Hannibal grips his hips and helps him grind.

"I'd take her tongue, first," Will breathes, closing his eyes and dropping his forehead to Hannibal's shoulder. Hs shudders, panting heavily, warm on Hannibal's neck, and pushes his hands to Hannibal's chest. Under a flex of his will, their clothes melt away – Will has always been so capable with wandless magic. The sudden pressure of Will against him, naked and warm, makes Hannibal moan. "I want her to scream."

"What else?" Hannibal demands, breathless. He slides a hand down Will's back, curls his fingers to test his mate's readiness. Another spell, another flicker of intention, and his fingers sink into Will, find him warm and wet and open. Will growls against his neck, licks wet and wide along Hannibal's thundering pulse.

"I'd – *ah*, fuck!" Will tenses, hissing, as Hannibal pushes into him with two fingers, smiling and crooking them to touch that place inside of Will that makes him lose his voice. Will's panting grows heavier, he paws restlessly at Hannibal's shoulders and whimpers, grinding his erection against Hannibal's. "I'd bleed her, slowly. Put mercury in her blood and feed it back to her so she felt like she was losing her mind."

Will is so cruel, so merciless. Hannibal loves him.

"I want to brand her," he whispers. "Burn her."

Hannibal pulls his fingers out, wrapping Will's fake slick around his cock. He cradles Will's hip with his other hand, turns his head to kiss Will's sweaty throat, and angles Will so that he can sink down. Will howls, long and low, slams his hands on the wall beside Hannibal's head as he takes Hannibal in, deep and assured, his body clenching up wonderfully around Hannibal.

"I want her to say she's sorry, I want -. *Hannibal,* please," Will gasps, throwing his head back as Hannibal holds his thighs and helps him move. Will is a man of singular mindsets – when he focuses himself, every piece of him is driven to finish whatever he has put his mind to. Whether that's study, teaching, hunting, or taking Hannibal like this. Nothing exists in him but the animal drive to fight and fuck and seek solace in his mate's blood on his tongue.

Will trembles for him, whining softly, his teeth bared, eyes glazed. He rights his head, rolls his hips and Hannibal shivers, swallowing harshly at the feeling of Will, clinging and hot around him. He plants his feet and thrusts upwards, driving into Will as deeply as he can until Will howls for him again.

Will's hand drops to his erection, stroking quickly, and he sags forward again, ruts all-animal and needy, snaps his teeth around Hannibal's shoulder and digs in with his sharp canines. "If it's the last thing I do, my love," Hannibal breathes, "I will grant you your wish."

Will whimpers, goes still, spilling with another plaintive cry over his hand and their stomachs. He spasms around Hannibal, groaning in need, and keeps moving, wanting to sate that second animal drive in him – to be mounted by his mate, ensnared and taken and utterly consumed.

Hannibal embraces him, holds Will tight as he thrusts, letting himself linger when Will takes him to the hilt. Will whimpers, nuzzles Hannibal's sweaty neck, panting fiercely from relief and an unmet desire. He bites again, doesn't split skin but threatens to, and drags his dirty hand up Hannibal's chest to spread his scent.

"Give me you," he demands, breathy and soft. Hannibal sucks in a breath, only to have his air stolen as Will takes him by the throat and kisses him deeply. He settles heavy on Hannibal's lap, growls and sinks his teeth into Hannibal's lower lip as Hannibal stills, clawing at him, and comes inside him.

Will sighs, his eyes black and smile wide, cutting into his red cheeks. He nuzzles Hannibal, licks over his heavy pulse, purring loudly as Hannibal clenches his eyes tightly shut and uses Will's body to drag out his own orgasm. It floods him like alcohol; a heavy, warm satisfaction at the sound of Will's purr, the aftershock-twitches in his thighs and back.

Will nuzzles him, licks over his jaw, kisses there, and then his mouth again. He cups Hannibal's face, and smiles sweetly.

"If that boy touches her again, I'll kill him myself," he promises.

Hannibal smiles. "I would expect nothing less."

"Miss Hobbs, thank you for obeying the summons today. We are about to vote on your motion to abolish the monitoring and subsequent laws of punishment for underage magic." Abigail nods, smiling at her father, and Hannibal gestures to the rest of the ministers. "Ladies and gentlemen, if you please."

Every witch and wizard summons a glowing ball, and lifts it to the ceiling. Right now they are all a pale white. Green means 'For', red means 'Against'. She watches with baited breath, one hand dropping to pet the large dog sitting by her, the other clasping her pendant tightly.

Will rests his head on her thigh, and whispers to her; "Moment of truth."

She nods, and casts her own ball up. Will doesn't have one – he doesn't belong with the ministers, after all.

"Cast your votes," Hannibal calls, his voice cracking through the air like a whip strike. Abigail flicks her wand, and her ball turns green. Around hers, there is a ring of red, and she watches with despair as it appears that the vote is almost entirely even – for every green ball, there is a red to match it.

There is silence, and then Hannibal tilts his head. His own vote remains by his seat, on a little podium, remaining white for now.

"A perfect split," Hannibal says, and smiles at her. "Do you have any additional remarks, before I cast my vote?"

She raises an eyebrow at him, and his eyes flash with amusement. Whenever she has looked at him like that, he tells her it reminds him of Will. "Very well," he says, and waves his wand. For a moment, the ball doesn't change, and even though she knows his opinion on the matter, she breathes out a heavy sigh of relief when the pigment of the smoke changes, and becomes a bright, glowing green.

"The motion carries," Hannibal says, and the orbs disappear from the ceiling. Abigail knows, at her side, that her father's sharp eyes are scanning the crowd – he will know, by smell, by the looks on their faces, who is unhappy with the decision. Who they will have to keep an eye on.

Hannibal stands. "We will form a committee of ambassadors to treat with the muggle world leaders and work on a program for the implementation of magical education. But as of this day, the laws surrounding the monitoring and punishment of all underage magic are abolished." Hannibal smiles at her. "Congratulations, Miss Hobbs."

Abigail stands, grinning, and bows her head. "Thank you, Minister," she says. Against her throat, her father's pendant glows and pulses with warmth and pride. She nods to the rest of the auditorium at large. "Thank you for your time."

She turns and leaves the building, Will and Winston following along behind, and once they are out of the building, she jumps in place, clapping her hands together, and lets out a whoop

of victory.

"Good job, baby," Will murmurs to her, and nuzzles her hand. "I'm so proud of you."

She grins down at him, and kneels, cupping his face. "We should make dinner for papa, tonight," she says. Will's ears perk up. "We've been promising to do it for ages – we should tonight. Let's go hunting and get something special."

Will grins at her, and licks her hands. "Lead the way," he says, and she stands, touching his muzzle, and Winston nudges his nose to her thigh so that, when she aparates, all three of them disappear.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

> Some notes: in this chapter one of the big spiders dies, there's a blink-and-you-miss-it mention of pedophilia (that Will and Abigail kill for the foods) and obligatory fooling around in a broom closet :D Also, as always, prophecies are the worst to write.

Neither can live while the other survives.
That prophecy claimed untold thousands of lives.
Be wiser with this one, for he knows the game,
And takes many mantles, answers to every name.
The boy born in fire whispers to his kin.
Unnoticed and silent, the ice slithers in.
Rally now: without goodness, the darkness will win.

"There are many ways a witch or wizard can change their shape," Hannibal says, once his students have gathered. Abigail sits in the front row, as she always has, eager and attentive to his voice. "I'm sure you have covered a fair few in your other lessons, but there is one that you will learn in this class. The Polyjuice Potion."

He casts his gaze around the room, and smiles. "You all have pewter cauldrons, so we will be brewing them for twenty-four hours, and will be able to test them in tomorrow's class. For now, we will be making the base. I've written the ingredients on the board, and you will find the instructions on page fifty-seven in your books."

A few of the more eager students have already found the page, Abigail among them. "You'll find the ingredients you need on the shelves to your right – don't crowd, there is plenty for everyone. Please pair up with your neighbor and begin, and let me know if you have any questions."

They rise, a couple with books in hand, and go to the shelves. Hannibal takes his seat behind his desk, using the relative quiet as an opportunity to grade essays from his seventh-year students, who were tasked on writing up the results of their experiments making Liquid Luck. Failures, he has said many times, are just as important as successes, and being able to analyze where an experiment went wrong will ensure it does not happen again.

A soft squeal draws his attention, and Hannibal smiles when he sees one of the girls grimace as one of the boys playfully waves a leech in front of her face. They both quiet when they catch Hannibal watching, his brow raised.

Against his chest, the pendant Will enchanted so his thoughts can be heard as an animal pulses with warmth, and Hannibal tilts his head, and touches the bulge of it lightly above his robes. "Yes, darling?" He sends the thought quietly, and doesn't let his expression change.

"Are you in class?" Will whispers to him. Hannibal sends a soft 'Yes' in answer. "Lock the doors and don't let anyone out. There's something in the castle."

Hannibal doesn't frown, but he does rise, and goes to the door. It is closed for his classes, always, and he makes sure that the bolt is in place. He turns away and finds Abigail watching him, but she doesn't comment as Hannibal returns to his desk.

"Are you alone?" Hannibal asks, for he always worries for Will – Will is the kind of man to get it into his head to take down any threat, and regardless of his negative emotions about this school, he will fiercely defend the students inside it, to the last.

The pendant flashes with warmth, and Hannibal feels an emotion akin to a headshake. "Winston is helping me, and I have Gideon here too. Jack knows. The ghosts are helping us."

"What's in the castle?"

"I don't know – it's familiar, but I've never smelled it like this before." Will's mind withdraws, but the connection is maintained so Hannibal can be aware of him. He doesn't like not being able to hear Will, and if there's even a hint of danger, Hannibal would go crazy if he couldn't reach out and reassure himself that Will is safe.

"Professor," one student calls – the same Gryffindor with the allergy to Valerian. She's started straightening her hair and braiding it, like Abigail does, and he nods to her, giving her his attention. "May I be excused?"

"For what purpose?" Hannibal asks.

"I have to go to the bathroom."

Hannibal sighs. "I'm sorry, Miss Harris, but you should have thought of that before class started."

She swallows, presses her lips together, and rises from her place beside her partner. She scurries over to Hannibal's desk, and leans in close, her voice a whisper;

"I think I just started…that time of the month, you know," she says with a quick handwave, towards her belly. "I'm not wearing anything for it. Please?"

Hannibal nods. "Alright, but you mustn't go alone. Abigail," he calls, and she straightens up and blinks at him. "Please go with Miss Harris to the restrooms. Be back as soon as you can." He cannot go with her and leave the students unattended while actively brewing a potion, and with Will indisposed, she is the next best thing.

She leaves her partner and approaches the other girl, offering a smile. "Hurry back," Hannibal says, and she looks at him for a long moment, brow creasing – clever girl, even when

Hannibal tries to control his expression, she seems to see right through it. She must have learned that trick from Will.

Abigail leads the way to the door, and unbolts it without hesitation, like this is perfectly normal. The two girls disappear and Hannibal sighs inwardly, anxious at the thought of them being out and about when there's a who-knows-what around the castle. If it's enough that Will needs to warn him away, it must be serious.

He sends a thought to Will; "Abigail and another student have gone to the restrooms. Perhaps Winston can keep an eye on them until they return."

Will's pendant pulses in acknowledgement. "I've sent him," he replies, and Hannibal nods, relaxing somewhat. Winston is just a dog, but he's very smart, and knows his way around the place. Whatever connection Will fostered with him, it is powerful. He'll make sure the girls are safe.

Still, he breathes out a heavy sigh of relief when Abigail and Miss Harris return, safe and sound. Abigail locks the door behind them, and they return to their potions without another word.

"Hannibal, what are you -? *Really*?"

Hannibal smiles, closing the door to the broom closet behind them, enveloping him and Will in the warm, dark, intimate space, which smells of pine and straw and, when he manages to get his nose in Will's hair, Will's scent floods his lungs.

He breathes out, wrapping his arms around Will. Will huffs, but embraces him, nuzzling the knot of Hannibal's tie.

"A broom closet?" he complains.

"It was convenient," Hannibal replies, and cups Will's face, kissing him deeply. Will gasps, arching against him, shivering despite the heat. "I missed you terribly – I don't think I realized how often being Ravenclaw captain would take me away from you."

"But you won the away match," Will says, breathy now, winded by Hannibal's kiss. Even as he speaks, his chin lifts, seeking another. "I heard it was quite a game."

"Forgive me, darling, but I don't care about that," Hannibal replies. Will grins at him, eyes bright in the darkness, and lets himself be kissed again. "I feel as though there is a fire in me – you, my only source of oxygen. Without you with me, I will grow cold, and fade into nothing."

Will nods. He understands that, deeply; without Hannibal the days seem cold and fierce against his skin, an ever-present chill that only melts under Hannibal's touch. He tilts his head, lets Hannibal kiss his jaw, his neck, nuzzling over his rushing pulse.

"Can't be having that," Will says. He pushes at Hannibal's shoulders, turns him and shoves him against the place where Will just was. He kisses, growling when Hannibal's hand slides to his hair and tightens, tugs. His legs spread and his stomach sinks in to let Will claw his way closer.

Will pulls back, breathes out heavily, and bites his lower lip. His cheeks are flushed from the heat, sweat coating his neck and beginning under his arms, low on his back where Hannibal's other hand rests and presses, encouraging him to come closer. Will wants to go – he would go as deep as Hannibal let him, claw himself a place to settle like a wolf in a den, his home and hearth right beneath Hannibal's heart.

"Will," Hannibal breathes, tender and soft.

Will swallows, and lifts his eyes. "Can you be quiet?" he whispers. Hannibal's head tilts, and Will smiles, and sinks to his knees.

"Oh." Hannibal's grip in his hair turns fierce, his thighs shaking when Will presses his hands flat. "Will, you don't have to -."

"I want to," Will murmurs, and leans in, kisses wide and warm along the swelling bulge of Hannibal's cock. Hannibal shivers, growling softly, as Will unfastens his uniform slacks and pushes at the halves, reaches in and pulls Hannibal's cock out as it hardens fully in his hand. "I missed you too," Will confesses, and turns his head, lets his lips drag up the shaft, licks at the head. "I would stay awake at night, watching the stars. Pretended you were watching them with me."

"I was," Hannibal replies softly.

Will smiles up at him, and parts his lips, sucking the head of Hannibal's cock into his mouth. Hannibal groans, tilting his head back, his free hand flying to his mouth and pressing over it to stifle his sounds. Will laughs, breathing out through his nose as he takes in the first few inches, until it hits the back of his throat. His fingers curl around what he doesn't swallow.

He sucks as hard as he can, a novice at this, but the way Hannibal shakes for him is genuine and satisfying enough. He presses his other hand to Hannibal's thigh, curls around the back of it, encouraging him to thrust deeper, to make Will take it deeper. Hannibal obeys, holding Will's head still and rolling his hips, until he pushes past Will's gag reflex and into his throat.

Will chokes, but forces himself not to pull off – tries to relax as his throat clenches, earning a soft, stifled whine from Hannibal above him. He pulls back just a little, swallows his excess saliva, and sinks down again. Hannibal is leaking onto his tongue, salty and thin and warm, and he swallows it ravenously.

"Will," Hannibal breathes, ragged and urgent, and Will hums. He curls his tongue, licks harsh over Hannibal's slit, down, where he knows a man is sensitive from touching himself. Hannibal bucks, snarls lowly and fists Will's hair, trembling. He comes with another rough noise, flooding Will's mouth, and Will swallows it all.

When he's done, he pulls back with a gasp, and Hannibal hauls him to his feet, kisses him greedy and open, the taste of him shared. Will arches against him, his chest too warm and his pulse rushing, the heat in his cheeks feels like it adds another ten degrees to the quiet, tiny space.

Which one of them, he wonders, is the boy of fire Jack so fears? He cannot think it's Will, not when Hannibal burns for him so readily.

Hannibal's hand drops, presses between Will's legs, but Will stops him, shakes his head and shivers, kissing Hannibal's slack mouth.

"No," he murmurs, and Hannibal growls. "Tonight, come visit me. We'll go to the Forest and watch the stars."

He kisses Hannibal again, silencing his protest, and fixes his clothes for him as Hannibal catches his breath. When he pulls back, he is smiling, and in the muted light inside the cupboard, Hannibal's eyes are sharp and wild on his face.

Will's smile widens, and he touches his love's jaw, a tender press of fingertips only. "Promise me something," he whispers.

"Anything," Hannibal says, and Will can tell he means it.

Will swallows. It doesn't even seem like something he needs to say, and yet; "Promise me that you'll never die out. I want to see what the world looks like when you set it aflame."

Hannibal blinks at him, and smiles, wide enough to show his teeth. He takes Will by the nape and kisses him fiercely.

"Then there is something I'd like to show you," he murmurs. "Tonight."

Will nods, breathless with anticipation. "Tonight."

"Minister, care to comment on the results of the vote to abolish monitoring and punishment of underage magic?"

Hannibal smiles widely, and gives the *Daily Prophet* reporter a nod of his head. "Happily, Mister…?"

"Lounds," the man says. "Frederick Lounds. I believe you know my sister."

Hannibal's brows rise. "You share names?" he asks curiously. He would not know it, looking at the man, that he and Freddie were related – he has flat, blonde hair, a bulging beer gut, and a face reminiscent of tapioca pudding.

"She always looked up to me," Frederick says with a smarmy grin. Ah, there's the family resemblance. "But, yes, our parents weren't terribly imaginative, I'm afraid. Now, the new law?"

"Of course," Hannibal says. "I'm pleased to report that since the abolition, there have been a notable drop in underage incarcerations, and only a mild spike in magical nuisances across the globe. The muggle world leaders have been remarkably helpful to us, and we are beginning to implement our magical schooling program, as well as magic-related incident departments in the various muggle judicial systems."

"Yes, Miss Hobbs is spearheading that program, yes?" Hannibal nods, and Frederick's smile widens. He leans in and gives Hannibal's shoulder a conspiratorial nudge with his pen-wielding hand. "Quite an up and comer, isn't she? She only graduated from Hogwarts, what, two years ago?"

"I do not believe in writing off good ideas because the presenter of such ideas is young," Hannibal replies coolly. "As they say, the children are our future. No one rules the world for long, Mister Lounds, and I have always strived for change and the betterment of the muggle and wizarding world alike."

"Of course, of course," Frederick says, waving his hand again. "Now, off the record." Hannibal's brows lift – he knows enough about reporters to know nothing is truly off the record. "There have been rumors going around that Abigail Hobbs is your adopted daughter. Care to comment?"

Frederick's eyes, bright and blue, are wide, utterly without guile. But Hannibal knows a snake in the grass when he sees it.

"I'm not sure where those rumors came from," Hannibal replies, as mildly as he can manage. "But if your angle here is nepotism, I can assure you it was not the case. Miss Hobbs presented her idea, the vote was split, and I judged as I believed to be right." He smiles, and wonders if Mister Lounds' neck would taste as sweet as pudding, or if he would be too coated with grime to stomach properly. "I don't think there is a man alive that could say the decision was a bad one, wouldn't you agree, Mister Lounds?"

"Oh, certainly, the results speak for themselves," Frederick replies, lips pursing, looking vaguely put out that he wasn't able to wring a confession from Hannibal so easily. "Are we to be expecting any more wild changes in government policy?"

"I suppose that will depend on the next council meeting," Hannibal says. He feels, around his neck, Will's pendant thrumming with impatience, wondering where he is. He touches his chest and sends a soft thought to his mate; "Soon, darling, first I must deal with this buzzing fly."

A flicker of intrigue; "Flies tend to swarm," Will murmurs. "Tread carefully."

"Well," Frederick says, drawing Hannibal's attention back. "Good luck, Minister. I'm sure by the end of it, the old world will be in ashes."

Hannibal smiles, widely, and gives the man a polite nod. "We can only hope."

Hannibal knows the second Will has found the intruder – his head floods, suddenly, with a visceral snarl, so fierce and loud that his own lip twitches in answer. He lifts his head, and touches the pendant.

"What is it, darling?" he murmurs in his own mind. He can taste blood in his teeth.

"A fucking spider," Will snarls, and in a flash of shared vision, Hannibal sees Will attacking the beast – it's a large one, one of the ones that dwell deep in the Forbidden Forest, a descendent of Aragog. Now it is curled up in death, twitching as Will paces around the carcass and waits for Jack to arrive. "I should have known, but it smelled weird."

"Like what?"

"Like death," Will says, snapping his jaws together. His stomach heaves, and Hannibal fights the urge to spit, tasting the spider's blood in his mouth – unpleasant, not the iron-rich lifeblood of a mortal, but pungent and sour like lemons gone bad.

Will's attention shifts, as Jack undoubtedly appears, and his mind withdraws so they are not so fiercely connected. Hannibal frowns down at his essays, deeply concerned – the spiders have never ventured close enough to the Forest borders to even see sunlight, and yet here one was, *inside* the castle.

"Please tell Jack I would like to speak to him, after class," he says, and Will huffs, displeased at the idea of changing shape to talk to Jack, but agrees with a soft pulse of warmth. "You did well, darling – I'm proud of you."

Will's mental presence gentles, at that. Hannibal knows his tail is wagging. He smiles.

They catch and kill a muggle man who had a bad habit of targeting young girls for his own perverse pleasures. He's a thickly-built man, strong, but ultimately cannot fight against fangs and magic both. Will and Abigail fell him easily, and aparate back to Will's house on the edge of the Forest. They use magic to strip his bones and take the meat they desire, and Abigail begins to cook as Will and Winston drag the carcass to the Forest, for the creatures within to devour it as they see fit.

Will returns with blood in his jaws, and quickly changes shape, shaking himself off as his limbs and joints pop and crack back into human shape. Abigail smiles at him when she sees him, and Will wipes his face clean and nuzzles her gently, sighing when he sees the man's thighs already prepared for baking.

"Smells good," he murmurs, as she opens the little oven and slides the meat in. He takes her hand. "There are berries growing by the river. Come, help me gather some."

She smiles widely at him, and follows him out, grabbing a basket as they go. Winston barrels on ahead, both to make sure the coast is clear and because he likes to run around and sniff everything that catches his fancy. They walk to the riverbank and kneel by a thick-growing bush that is adorned with blackberries.

She pops one into her mouth, humming in pleasure at the sweet taste. Will smiles at her, and they continue to add to their basket. "Dad," she says, after a while, and Will looks at her. She picks a seed from her teeth, talking around her finger; "Why didn't you ever try and be a teacher, or go to the Ministry like papa?"

Will shrugs. "Politics aren't my game," he replies. "Your father's always been better at talking to people. You both are."

"I think you'd be good at it, though," Abigail says. "You see shit. You notice things."

"So do you guys."

Her head tilts.

"Sometimes it's better to not be seen – helps you see better. You'd be amazed what kinds of things people get up to when they think no one is looking."

Abigail grins at him, wide and slanted. "Ah, so you're a snitch."

Will huffs a laugh, nudging her playfully. "The best in the business, baby," he replies, and she tosses her head with a laugh to match his. "There's an old saying for muggles – 'Behind every great man there is a great woman'. Obviously I'm not a woman, but the sentiment remains the same." He shrugs again. "Your father is a great man, but he can't rule alone. There are some things he can't do, in the spotlight."

"Like hunting?" Abigail murmurs.

Will nods. "Yeah, like hunting." He sighs, and looks down at the blackberry bush. He pushes his hand between the prickles and thorns, snagging a particularly ripe-looking cluster of berries, and adds them to the basket. "And other things."

She stares at him, openly, and makes a curious sound.

Will sighs again. "Did you ever hear, as a kid, or maybe around the Ministry, of a prophecy, about a second Dark Lord?" She nods. "Well, for a long time, a lot of people thought he was going to be that person." He doesn't tell her he fell under equal scrutiny – he's not sure how.

"Well…" She pauses, and swallows. "Is he?"

"I have no idea," Will replies mildly. "Will he slaughter thousands of innocents, or start a war? Of course not. But the position he's in now…. Well, he has power. He could change everything. It's my job to make sure he can keep doing that."

"What would he change?" Abigail asks. "I mean, the new laws, the new integration, sure, but…"

Will lifts his shoulder in a shrug. "My job, my role, is to make sure whatever he needs done, gets done. Whether that's listening in on the right things, or doing some of the dirty work. I believe he can make this world better, I really, truly believe that, but there are some things that are never going to be accepted, or welcomed."

She considers this, silently, for a long time, as they strip the bush of serviceable berries, dust off their hands, and stand, walking back towards the house. When it's in sight, Winston runs past them and inside, and she pauses, looking up to the castle.

She breathes out heavily, in a way that reminds Will so starkly of Hannibal that he aches. He hopes Hannibal will join them soon. "I don't think he's evil," she says slowly. "But you're right – the things we want to do are…radical, by some standards. A lot of people could get hurt."

Will nods. "Such is the price of change," he says, and squeezes her shoulder, nuzzling her dark hair. She smiles at him, and rubs their cheeks together in a fond gesture. He guides her inside, the house filled with the scent of roasting meat.

Hannibal arrives just as they have finished with the meat, and created a thick, sweet-tart sauce from the berries. Will smiles, and lets out a happy purr, going to his mate and embracing him tightly, Abigail coming up behind him and squishing Will between them as the three of them hug.

"Hello, my loves," Hannibal greets warmly, and kisses Will's cheek, then Abigail's forehead. "You must forgive me – I feared the meetings today would never end."

"You're here now," Will murmurs, and kisses Hannibal chastely. "Come. Eat with us."

Hannibal smiles, and sheds his coat, as Will leads the way to the dining table. "Of course. Happily."

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

I know I say it every time but it's ALWAYS TRUE I HATE WRITING PROPHECIES.

Beside him, Freddie is behaving little better than a hissing cat, flexing her red-painted nails against her green dress, her sharp chin raised in haughty countenance, her brows arched as she glares at Hannibal fiercely.

"Your *job* is to teach potions," she says with another hiss. "And to monitor *your* house, not mine, or anyone else's!"

Hannibal sighs, and resists the urge to roll his eyes. He has no affection for Freddie at this moment, fresh off of her very public giving of a tongue-lashing in the quad before Hannibal had suggested bringing her dispute to Jack. The Headmaster, who is now sitting behind his large, dark desk, his hands folded in front of him, is looking at them both with an expression Hannibal imagines he would be giving his child, if he had any.

"Professor Lounds, what exactly is it that Hannibal has done?" he says, and he sounds tired. His wife's illness weighs upon him heavily, Hannibal can see that from a mile away. He wonders if Freddie notices, and simply doesn't care.

Freddie turns her glare to Jack. "He's teaching the girls in his class about…health," she says. As soon as she says it, she blinks, and presses her lips together, as if only just now realizing how foolish that sounds. Jack's brows rise, thinking the same, and Hannibal hides his smile behind a mask of careful neutrality.

"Health," Jack repeats.

Hannibal sighs, and nods. "When a spider made its way into the castle, one of the students had started her period, and needed to use the restroom. I sent another student with her, since I could not go myself, and they both made it back safely, but I came to realize that there is no program here for anything regarding biological or sexual health."

Freddie blanches. "They should *not* be thinking about sex."

"Children may think about all sorts of things, depending on character, upbringing, age, and what they are exposed to," Hannibal returns coolly. "I grant you not all of them will take my lessons as an excuse to start sleeping with each other, and I also grant you that some of them might – but, if they are going to do it anyway, at least they can be safe, and know how to protect themselves."

She hisses at him again, baring her little teeth. She certainly couldn't hurt anyone with a bite like that.

"Professor Lounds, Headmaster, we are housing a number of children who are on the verge of, or right in the middle of undergoing maturity. Many muggle schools have programs regarding safe sex, biology, and everything in between. Why can't we?"

"This is a place for *learning*," Freddie presses. "And that does not extend to sex!"

Hannibal sighs through his nose, lifts his eyes to buy himself a moment of patience, and looks at her again. "I won't argue about this," he says flatly. "Students will form relationships, and some of those relationships will become romantic in nature. Teaching them how to be safe and smart about it hurts no one." He raises a brow when she huffs, and folds her arms across her chest. "Even if that is not the case, surely you can sympathize with the unpleasantness of monthly bleeding. What harm have I caused, teaching students how to manage their pain, or stop the cycle altogether until they are willing to suffer it?"

Freddie lifts her chin, challenging and brash. "It's part of being a woman," she snaps, and Hannibal resists the urge to roll his eyes again.

Jack holds up a hand, stopping any reply, and fixes Freddie with an impatient look. "I agree with Hannibal," he says, and she blinks at him, but then Jack looks at Hannibal. "And I agree with Freddie. Potions class is for teaching potions, Hannibal." He sighs, and rubs a hand over his mouth. "Perhaps a compromise – an after-school class, voluntary, for any student who wants to learn about it."

Hannibal smiles.

"Not just run by you, though you can oversee and organize it, if you'd like."

"Excellent," Hannibal purrs. "I think I will recruit Miss Katz and Mister Graham, if that suits."

Jack's eyes flash, and his lips turn down at the corners. But he nods, brow creasing – despite making it through their school years, and marrying each other, Jack has never liked the idea of Hannibal and Will being left alone, to concoct whatever dark plans he thinks Will is capable of.

"The groundskeeper and the Quidditch coach?" Freddie scoffs.

"Will and Beverly have spent more time with muggles than any of us here," Hannibal replies coolly. "And they're not teachers, not like we are. They are more approachable to nervous students, especially with Winston."

"Oh, so now the dog gets to be in on it too?"

Hannibal's fingers curl. He makes them flatten, smoothing an imaginary crease in his robes.

"I think you'd be surprised how far a little personability goes, Professor Lounds," he murmurs. "You might want to try it sometime."

Freddie lets out a high-pitched, offended noise, and looks about ready to draw her wand on Hannibal, but Jack glares at her, forcing her to remain silent. "Tuesday and Thursday nights," he says, and nods Hannibal's way. "One hour, after school. You can use the Room of Requirement."

Hannibal nods, and smiles. "Thank you, Headmaster," he says.

"Keep your daytime classes on topic, Hannibal. Freddie, I don't want to hear about you interfering, or telling students not to go. I won't hear any more on the matter."

Hannibal rises, knowing when he's being dismissed, and gives Jack and Freddie a courteous nod. "Have a good afternoon," he says, and leaves Jack's office, down the winding stairs that still hold the shape of the phoenix at the bottom – an old relic, from times past.

Will is there, as a man, and Hannibal blinks in surprise, but is pleased, to see Will walking on two legs. At his side is Winston, as always, and they walk together away from Jack's office, hands close enough to brush, but they do not lace in case anyone sees them.

"How'd it go?" Will murmurs.

"You, Beverly, and I will begin running an after-school program on Tuesdays and Thursdays, in the Room of Requirement, to continue educating any student who would like to join on reproductive and biological health."

Will smiles at him, and lets out a happy rumble. A gaggle of Ravenclaws pass by them, and they nod in greeting to their Head of House, casting curious eyes at Will. Of course, no one would recognize him as a man, since he navigates the school grounds almost exclusively in his wolfdog shape. They know Winston, though – Hannibal sees a few of the sharper ones perk up in recognition, but they pass without a word, and leave Hannibal and Will to themselves.

Will sighs, and runs a hand over his jaw, up through his hair. "Was Freddie pissed?"

"Very," Hannibal replies with a smile. "I can't imagine why – if I had a uterus, and it was half as bad as I have been led to believe, I think I would leap at any opportunity to curb the unpleasantness."

Will nods in sympathy. The first time Abigail had her period was relatively normal, as far as Hannibal knows, but they taught her how to ease the pain, and taught her a charm that lessened the bleeding to almost nothing. She still has them, but they are light and infrequent, and barely make her lose step. Both Hannibal and Will know when it's coming, with their keen senses of smell, and have always made sure to stock their pantry with iron-rich food, chocolate, and keep a fire blazing bright so she can be warm and comfortable.

They walk through the halls and out onto the lawn. The air is cold, the sky heavy with a promising storm, and Will shivers, looking up, his eyes near-black with no sun to make them shine. He smiles, and turns to Hannibal, bringing them both to a halt.

"Have you noticed any more creatures from the Forest prowling too close?" Hannibal asks him.

Will shakes his head. "I told the centaurs and the thestrals to be aware, and have heard nothing from either," he replies. Another shiver runs through him, and his shoulders roll, his lips twitch to show his teeth. Hannibal wants to soothe him, to pet his neck and hold his mate, but Will is a terribly private person, and does not tolerate public displays of affection in the castle. Not since Hannibal took his position here.

"I feel something moving in there, sometimes, when it's dark," Will says. "I dream of flames, that surround the castle on all sides." His eyes lift, meeting Hannibal's, unfathomably dark, and wide with something akin to fear. "I don't know what it is, but it's strong, and it's evil. It makes everything in me feel cold."

Hannibal frowns, for Will is fearless. "Is it something we should investigate?" he asks quietly, stepping closer so no one else can hear, though there is no one but them around.

Will sucks in a breath, pressing his lips together, and looks out to the Forest, the dark and widespread canopy of trees. Despite the pending storm, nothing moves, and the air is quiet as though holding its breath.

He turns back, and meets Hannibal's eyes. "Come with me, tonight," he whispers. "We'll investigate together."

Hannibal nods. "I will," he says. "When everyone is asleep."

Will nods as well. He looks around, sharp eyes taking in the strong stone, the dark grass, the windows absent of any prying eyes, and then he steps in, touches Hannibal's cheek, and kisses his other one, quick and chaste but warm enough to sting.

"I'll see you later," he says, and touches Hannibal's chest, where the pendant hangs. He steps back with a smile, and shifts into his dog form, shaking his pelt as his joints melt into place, knees backwards, hair shifting to cover his body. He barks at Hannibal once, quiet and low, wags his tail, and nudges Winston, and the two dogs surge forward towards Will's house.

Hannibal watches them go, and smiles, before he turns back to the castle.

"…*Oh*."

Will is struck silent, awed by the sight before him. Hannibal has brought him to a clearing, in which there is a single totem, a man – what was once a man, carved out and hollowed to allow flowers to be placed. Queen Anne's Lace, and Freesia, and Amaryllis. Sunflowers encase the corpse's feet, and the man's arms are spread out wide like he's hanging from a cross, his head bowed down so Will cannot see his face.

He steps forward, tugging on Hannibal's hand, and bows his head. Tilts the corpse's chin up, to reveal his Dark Arts teacher, Matthew Brown. The one who always looked at Will for a little too long, a little too promising. The one who liked to touch Will's shoulders and keep him after class to help him clean up lessons no matter what.

He turns, finds Hannibal watching him, as though this display means nothing to him. Will shivers, and bites his lower lip. His hand falls from Professor Brown's chin, and touches the sleek, soft petals of the blooming flowers. They have grown rich in the nutrients of a dead body – he's been here for a few days, if Will had to guess, from the smell.

"You…did this?" he whispers.

Hannibal nods, and squeezes Will's hand. "No magic."

No magic. No way for a witch or wizard to trace motive or method. He doesn't know the meaning of the flowers – later, Hannibal would tell him, in the dark Astronomy tower with no one around, that they symbolized sanctuary, splendid beauty, a deep, abiding love. And later, Will would weep, and kiss him, and thank him for the gift.

"You did this for me," he says, though that seems obvious.

"I know how he looked at you," Hannibal replies quietly. Not possessive, though Will knows he is certainly that – protective. Hannibal killed Professor Brown because he posed a threat to Will. In all his life, Will doesn't know anyone who has done half so much.

"What if they catch you?"

"No one knows he's here," Hannibal says. "Tonight, the beasts will come and take his body far away. He will disappear; another wayward soul that wandered too deep and never came out."

Will shivers again. He does not know what to call this – his nose stings with the scent of death, the flowers doing little to cover it, for they are not powerful with scent. In the darkness, in the moonlight, the pale skin and solid red of bared flesh and leaking blood contrasts with the whiteness of the Lace, and the pretty purple and yellow of the Freesia matches the collar of bruises around Professor Brown's neck.

"You killed him with your bare hands," Will breathes, and despite the cold night, he burns. "Just because he looked at me wrong."

"I slaughtered a pig that thought he was a man," Hannibal replies, unrepentant and proud. As proud and brash and brazen as wildfire, which cares not who it kills, what it consumes. Hannibal's hand is warm in his, and Will turns to him and gasps, and Hannibal smiles, and cups his cheek. Thumbs over the flush forming on Will's neck.

"This is what my future holds, Will," he says, like a promise. "I would do anything, remove anyone from our path, if it made you smile like that."

And Will is smiling. Should he be smiling? A man is dead because the man he loves, loves him back. Without limit. He turns his head and nuzzles Hannibal's warm palm, sucks in a shaky breath that smells of his mate, and closes his eyes.

"Every great deed requires sacrifice," he murmurs. Hannibal smiles, and Will meets his eyes. Will cups his face, unable to help himself, and kisses him deeply, pressing close so Hannibal can embrace him, crushing them together.

When they part, Hannibal's eyes shine in the moonlight, and he looks monstrous and beautiful. "I won't ask you to do the same," he murmurs.

Will frowns. "You think I couldn't?"

"No, I think you are more than capable of destroying your enemies, my love," Hannibal replies quietly, resting their foreheads together. "But I will never ask you to. You move throughout your life, watched and caged. I promise I will never confine you, never restrict you or rein you in. I want, for you, Will, more than anything, to simply be free. And I will do whatever I must to make that happen."

Will shivers, breathing out shakily. "How?"

Hannibal smiles, dark with promise. Planning, always planning, his brilliant mind never stops. "Don't worry about that now," he purrs, and kisses Will again. "Come, darling – let us simple enjoy this lovely night, and watch the stars."

"You're causing quite a stir, Minister!"

Hannibal smiles, and gives Frederick a cordial nod as he's approached. Across from the little coffee table outside the café is Abigail, and at their feet, Will and Winston, resting in the sun. "Hello, Mister Lounds," he says, watching Abigail's eyes flash with recognition at the name, and Will's ears twitch, his jaw lifts from Hannibal's foot as he looks at the man.

"Not even six months after abolishing underage wizarding laws, you've made a motion to cease the mandatory registration of animagi," Frederick continues. "One must wonder if you're trying to create anarchy."

"Is it order, then, to force some of our population to register themselves like criminals, simply for performing a spell that allows them to change shape?" Hannibal asks. "Should we also ban Polyjuice Potions, and werewolves, and skinwalkers?"

Frederick crows in delight, his pen scratching over his notebook as he commits Hannibal's words to paper. "Well said, well said! I wonder, though – some are asking if it is, in fact, wise. There is a reason animagi are monitored, especially after that whole ordeal under He Who Must Not -."

"Frederick, forgive me for interrupting," Hannibal murmurs, raising a hand. "But I am not, as I have never been, the beginning and end of such decisions. We cannot deny the positive results of the abolition, and again, I ask you; who is harmed by allowing wizards and witches of a certain skill to practice their magic unmolested?"

"One might argue that if there were stricter laws and guidelines, the Dark Lord of old would never have come to power."

Hannibal sighs. "There is a saying in the muggle community – Miss Hobbs, perhaps you can phrase it best for me?"

Abigail smiles at him. "'When you make something illegal, the only people who still do it are criminals anyway'. It was the same for muggle laws, and it is the same for us. If we outlaw something, prisons fill too quickly, and disorder reigns." She arches a brow, Will-like to a fault, and looks at Frederick. "There are thousands of animagi in the world, Mister Lounds. Are we to throw them all in prison for missing a registration date?"

Frederick smiles at her, slick and cold. At his chest, Will's pendant pulses with aggravation, though he does nothing but lick his wide muzzle and yawn large enough to show his sharp teeth. It is not a threatening gesture in and of itself, but Hannibal knows Frederick sees it.

"Perhaps," Hannibal suggests, "instead of ambushing me during a policy meeting, you would like to arrange a time for an exclusive interview, where we can discuss the motions of the Ministry. No holds barred."

Frederick's smile widens. "Very gracious of you, Minister," he says with a small bow. "I will check my schedule and send you a correspondence for a time as soon as I'm able."

"Excellent," Hannibal murmurs. "If that will be all?"

"Thank you," Frederick says, and turns away, striding down the street and disappearing around a corner.

Abigail huffs. "A snake, that one."

Will's pendant pulses again, still annoyed, but warmer now; "Snakes are easy to kill," he says, and grins up at both of them, wagging his tail once, a dull thump against the concrete. Hannibal leans down and cups his face, gently petting Will's muzzle until Will purrs, leaning into it, his eyes closing.

"My love," he whispers to Will, "perhaps it would be best to keep this one alive, for now."

Will huffs, and doesn't answer, but he licks Hannibal's palm and rests his head over Hannibal's foot again. Abigail shifts her weight uncomfortably. "Perhaps we shouldn't be seen in public together," she murmurs. "People are talking."

"Let them talk," Hannibal says with a dismissive wave of his hand. "For now, the Ministry is still very much a bureaucratic nightmare, and I cannot get away with blindly agreeing to a single young woman with wild ideas."

Abigail laughs.

Will lifts his head. "Do they think you two are involved, somehow?" he asks, soft with concern.

She shrugs, and pushes her foot under Will's belly, grinning when he huffs, but moves to allow her to warm her toes on his thick fur. Will's tail wags again. "Some people are saying we're family, some people are saying we're sleeping together," she says, and wrinkles her nose in distaste – a sentiment Hannibal feels as well, and knows is echoed in Will by a flash through the pendant. She laughs again. "Maybe I should stop suggesting 'wild' ideas, until the rumor mill finds something else to churn out."

"Nonsense, and I will not hear another word on that," Hannibal says, but he is smiling. "Never be ashamed of your ideas, Abigail – I do not tolerate it from your father and I will not tolerate it from you." She smiles warmly at him, wide and bright. "You are both brilliant people, and I love you dearly. Never be afraid or feel the need to hide who you are."

Across their bond, Will's affection pushes against him warmly, like a brush of his fur – like Will himself does, as he rubs his cheek against Hannibal's shin, purring quietly.

"I'll watch the snake," Will whispers to him. "You keep changing the world."

Hannibal smiles, and pets between his ears, over the soft, sleek fur lining his forehead. "As you wish, my love. I am yours to command."

Behold, a threat! The boy of flame
Who knows too well both fear and shame,
Will eagerly kill the one with claim
To the throne of iron, dragonsbane.
The boy of ice, thawed now and free,
Appears to all on bended knee.
But trust him not, turn not your back,
For that is when the wolves attack.
Fiercely, they fight, their friend the night.
The pack will rob the world of light.

Chapter 7

There is something in the woods behind his house. Will perks up, hackles rising, a low snarl rumbling in his chest as he pushes himself to his feet, and prowls from the house. During the summer, he and his mate spend their days in America, in Will's old homestead, where the trees and swamps are wild with creatures, and no one bothers them.

No one, except whatever is in the woods behind his house.

He smells something sharp, sickly, like a diseased animal, and his nose wrinkles, baring his sharp teeth. A coating of magic clings to the scent, telling him it is not simply an animal; not a deer or a wolf or some other such thing he can scare away.

Hannibal is not with him, having been called away to England, for a meeting with Jack Crawford, the current Headmaster of Hogwarts school. Will thinks, when Hannibal returns, it will be with an offer of a job; to join Hannibal in teaching, or whatever Jack has him do. Jack has always liked to keep an eye on Will, and he cannot do that with an ocean between them.

He shakes the thoughts off, prowling deeper into the thick underbrush. His nose burns with the foreign scent and he resists the urge to mark his territory over it – it is much more efficient, he has found, to kill or chase away the intruder and mark afterwards.

He finds a puddle of urine from the intruder trying to stake his claim, and snarls loudly, sending a nearby family of squirrels fleeing into the trees. His ears perk up and he noses at the edge of the puddle, finding it moderately fresh.

He snarls again, and lifts his head, looking around for signs of passage. Sees, ahead of him, the depression of leaves under four large paws. He tracks the imprints, tail batting wildly from side to side to try and clear the remnants of his scent behind him, in case the intruder has circled around.

He emerges into a small clearing, through which runs a tiny stream that makes the ground muddy and soft, hard to keep underfoot. There is, tucked underneath one of the trees, a bright basket that is covered in blankets and a single quilt. He gentles his snarl, huffing curiously, and approaches it.

He doesn't make it to the basket before the trees part, to his side, and there emerges a sleek black animal. It is not quite wolf-like as he is, but feline, a jaguar with wicked-looking fangs, bared and dripping with blood and saliva.

Will snarls, straightens his stance, lifts his hackles and arches his back to appear bigger. From the basket, he hears the weak, hiccupping cry of a child.

The cat lunges at him, and Will meets him easily, both animals clashing with fierce swipes of their claws and savage bites. Will hisses as the cat's teeth sink into his thick scruff, trying to jerk and break his neck. He beats the cat away from him, but doesn't let him gain the

advantage of lunging distance, and follows, his jaws clamping around the animal's foreleg and ripping savagely, shedding blood and exposing bone.

The cat howls, hissing sharply, and swipes at him, but Will darts away, circles, and lunges again. He has spent too long with his mate, knows too well how to hunt and hurt, to be beaten by some wild little kitten that tried to invade his territory.

He lunges again, and manages to get his forelegs over the cat's strong shoulders, his teeth in the nape of its neck. The cat yowls again, trembling, unable to fight back because of its shredded foreleg. It rolls onto its side, beneath Will, and swipes at his belly with sharp back claws.

Will snarls, and lets him go, jumping over him so that he can't get hurt any worse. It puts him closer to the basket, and from within, the hiccupping cries grow louder, more fierce. Will's ears flatten, wondering what kind of animal would take a *child* to a territory obviously marked, what kind of monster -.

The cat snarls at him, and lunges again, and Will grows tired, abruptly, of playing with his food. He snaps his jaws tight around the cat's throat, uncaring for the brace of claws on his shoulders and belly, and jerks the cat to the ground, plants his heavy paw on the animal's shoulder, and jerks his head sharply until he hears its neck snap.

The animal goes limp with a weak whimper, and Will growls, and sinks his teeth deeper into flesh until he tastes blood, his muzzle wrinkling at the scent of sickness. He bites until the cat's head is almost completely severed from its shoulders, and steps away, shaking himself off. Not even worth a meal.

He huffs, and changes shape, wiping his jaws clean, and approaches the basket.

Inside, the child is older than he expected – almost six or seven, if he were to guess, though she is small and curled up tightly. She looks up at him with wide, glassy eyes, and whimpers at the sight of blood around his mouth.

"Shh," he purrs, and kneels down beside her. His hands are clean of blood, for the most part, and he wipes his mouth on his sleeve and reaches out to touch the edges of her little cocoon. "It's alright. I'm not going to hurt you."

He smells blood – not his, not that of the cat – and frowns, tilting his head. "Are you injured?" he murmurs.

She presses her lips together, and sits up, pulling her long hair back from her neck, revealing a jagged-edged scar that looks freshly-healed, and like that of a claw. "He killed mama," she says, and her eyes well with tears. "He hurt me."

Will swallows down his snarl, sucks in a deep breath, and doesn't look back at the body. "I promise I won't hurt you," he says, quiet and earnest. "Would you like to come with me? It'll get cold soon – I have a dog you can play with, and my mate makes excellent food. We can take care of you until we find some of your family."

"I don't have any other family," she says weakly, and the tears begin to fall. Not, Will senses, for the loss of her captor. No, she doesn't even look his way, like he is no more important than another pile of leaves in her path. She looks at Will, for a long time, and says; "I like dogs."

Will smiles widely, careful not to show too much of his teeth, not wanting to frighten her. "Come," he purrs, and stands, holding out a hand to her. She takes it, and lets him pull her unsteadily from the basket. The quilt, she keeps, clutching it to her skinny chest. Still, she does not look at the cat. "I can get you some warmer clothes, and something to eat."

She nods, squeezing his hand overly-tightly in that way children do, and begins to walk with him back towards his house. "What's your name?" she asks.

"Will," he says. "And my mate's name is Hannibal. What's yours?"

"Abigail," she says. "Hobbs."

"It's nice to meet you, Abigail," Will says kindly, and gently squeezes her hand. She's not wearing any shoes, and so they walk carefully so she doesn't step on any sharp branches, or rocks, or nettles. By the time they get home, Will smells Hannibal in the house, and he leads her in, smiling when he sees his mate in the kitchen, unloading a cooler of fresh meat.

Her nostrils flare, and she looks at Hannibal with wide eyes, as he turns to them. He smiles at Will, and blinks in surprise when he sees her. "Hello there," he says, just as sweet and kind as he has always been to children.

"This is Abigail," Will says. "She's going to stay with us for a while."

Hannibal looks at him curiously, but accepts that with a nod. "Good thing I brought plenty of food," he says with a smile. "Are you hungry, Abigail?"

"Starving."

"Would you like to help me cook?"

She nods, eager and trusting enough, and lets go of Will's hand, walking over and taking Hannibal's outstretched one. Will smiles, but is bristling inwardly, eager to go back out and mark over whatever Hobbs did in his territory to try and claim it as his own.

He clicks his tongue, summoning Winston, and Abigail looks at the dog with wide eyes, grinning widely when he goes to her and immediately licks her free hand. She pets his head awkwardly, laughing, and Will feels settled when Winston's tail starts to wag. He has always been a remarkably good judge of character, and his presence will be soothing for her.

"I'll be right back," he promises. "And we'll get you set up with somewhere to sleep."

She nods at him, and Will shifts shape back to a wolf, and leaves through the open front door to go erase the last of Hobbs from his territory.

"The woods are lovely, dark and deep…"

Hannibal smiles, looking over to Will as he recites, almost absently, the first line of that age-old poem. "Do you think he was talking about this Forest?" he asks of Will. They are alone except for Winston, who is walking slowly at Will's side, as they enter the Forest. The night is dark and starless, hidden by clouds, and so Hannibal must rely on the dull glow at the tip of his wand, and Will's sharp eyes, to navigate in the darkness.

Will rolls his eyes, but smiles. "Of course not," he replies. "These woods are dark and deep, it's true, but I do not find them lovely."

Above them, the wind stirs the trees, and they groan as though in protest.

Hannibal squeezes Will's fingers gently, and sets his eyes forward. "Where have you felt this evil?" he murmurs.

"This way," Will replies, guided by some instinct Hannibal does not have, as he prowls through the trees, sure-footed as always. After a moment, Winston must find something that interests him, for the dog parts from them with a low huff, disappearing as a black shadow between the trees. Will sighs, breath misting in the cold air.

"I miss America," he says, after a while. "I miss the heat, and the short nights." He looks back at Hannibal, and sighs. "But you will insist we remain here, even after Abigail graduates, won't you?"

"The Ministry is here," Hannibal replies. "At least, the most powerful branch of it."

Will hums, and doesn't answer for a time. They walk in silence, only the crinkle of leaves beneath their feet letting anything know that they are here.

"I remember the first time you took me here," Will breathes, his eyes shining in the light cast from Hannibal's wand. He smiles, wide and happy, his thumb brushing over Hannibal's knuckles. "When you killed Professor Brown for me. What we did after."

Hannibal smiles, remembering it fondly. It is the first time Will burned for him, and since then, his fire has blazed brightly with passion. Will shivers as though cold, and swallows harshly.

"Time has not touched this place," Hannibal says. "Nor, my love, has it touched you."

Will laughs, though it's soft. "Of course it has," he murmurs. "Time has a way of making things sharper, or wearing them down until they are very dull. Which do you think I am?"

"You could cut the color from a butterfly's wings without harming it."

Will's cheeks darken, and he grins at Hannibal from beneath his wild hair. Then, he freezes abruptly, his eyes flashing as his gaze snaps to one side, and sharpens so suddenly that Hannibal's breath leaves him in a shaky exhale.

Will has the look of a hunter, and he's found the scent.

But he does not give chase. His fingers tighten between Hannibal's, and he takes a small step back, letting out a soft whine of distress. "We have to leave," he whispers. Hannibal immediately douses the light on his wand, wary of drawing attention to themselves, and tucks it into the inner pocket of his robe.

"Will -."

"We have to leave," Will says again, and steps back again, tugging fiercely on Hannibal's hand. There is no sound, no noise, no roar or snap of branches, but Will is trembling, and his scent is sharp with fear. He leaves no room for argument as he yanks on Hannibal's arm, pulling him back through the trees, until the light from his house can be seen through them. He doesn't pause until they are inside, and with a wave of his hand he conjures fire in the fireplace, rushing upwards too brightly, betraying his heightened emotions.

Hannibal turns to him, and cups his face, finds him shaking and clammy with sweat. He grips Hannibal fiercely, his eyes black and stuck on Hannibal's chest. He sucks in a breath, lets it out in a weak whine, and Hannibal takes him to the little couch along the wall, setting him down and covering him with a blanket.

"What did you sense, Will?" he whispers, letting Will tuck his face to Hannibal's neck as he pets through his hair.

Will shakes his head, whining softly, his fingers tense, knuckles white, as he lifts his heels and curls up on the couch, pressed tight to Hannibal's side.

"Evil," he whispers. "*Fuck*."

Hannibal swallows, and says, "Should we tell someone?"

"No," Will replies, knowing who he means. He pulls back, and though he is still trembling with distress, his voice is flat and firm. "Jack mustn't know. Not yet."

Hannibal tilts his head.

"I need to know what it is. I'll…I'll be calmer, in the daylight. I can do it."

"Will, darling," Hannibal says softly, shaking his head, "I cannot come with you during the day."

Will nods; he knows this already. He runs his hands through his hair, shakes himself sharply like a dog ridding itself of water, and stands with a snarl.

"That thing is getting closer," he says, almost to himself, though loud enough that Hannibal can hear it. He paces a few steps away, and turns, his eyes on the little window that looks out to the Forest. "It's strong, but it's…hesitating. I don't know why."

His brows pull down into a frown, and he bites his lower lip, and sets his gaze on Hannibal.

"Something is stopping it showing itself."

"You?" Hannibal suggests, and Will lifts a shoulder in a shrug. Hannibal sits back, resting an arm along the back of the couch, where Will was sitting. "Perhaps you are the fabled dark lord, and it's afraid of you."

"Or you," Will replies sharply. He never likes it when Hannibal mentions the prophecy, even in jest. "Something that evil wouldn't be afraid of a monster like I'm supposed to be, like you're supposed to be. It would seek to befriend us."

"Or take our place," Hannibal says, and smiles when Will looks at him again. "Prophecies are, by their nature, open to interpretation. There's nothing to say the dark lord will even come in our lifetimes."

"Jack seems so sure," Will whispers. Then, he sighs, and shakes his head, pushing his sweat-damp hair from his face. "How? How can he be so sure? What must it be like to see darkness wherever one looks?"

"Rather depressing, I think," Hannibal replies mildly. "To think Jack so frightened of a mere boy, as he was when we were young; well, it certainly tempers my regard for the man."

Will snaps his teeth together, and snarls. "I don't want to talk about Jack."

Hannibal smiles. "You mentioned him first, my love."

"Yes, well, now I'm done mentioning him," Will replies. If he were a dog, his hackles would be raised high, his scruff ruffled and ridged, his back arched. Hannibal stands, and goes to him, smoothing the invisible fur back into place as he pets over Will's nape.

Will sags against him, sighing, and whines against his neck.

"Can you stay with me, tonight?" he murmurs, weak and wanting.

"Of course, darling," Hannibal replies. Despite his calm outward demeanor, he is shaken by Will's reaction to that invisible, unnamed darkness he sensed in the trees. Will is fearless, and to see him afraid is troubling indeed. He takes Will back to the couch, since Will's little house doesn't have much in the way of a bed, but the couch itself is large enough for them to rest comfortably.

Will sighs, and lets Hannibal lie down, before he climbs atop him and pulls a blanket over their shoulders. His nose finds Hannibal's neck again, his hands resting over Hannibal's flanks, and the last of his tension melts away. Still, Hannibal cannot help think with a smile that Will is keeping his eyes on the door, and putting himself as the first line of defense, should something unfriendly come knocking.

Will shivers, and wraps his leg around Hannibal's thigh, and Hannibal lifts his knee so Will can tuck his foot beneath it. Will's heartbeat slows, naturally soothed by Hannibal's scent and warmth, and Hannibal closes his eyes, for he knows that Will, no matter how much he coaxes and settles him, will not sleep for some time.

Will nuzzles his neck, purring softly, and Hannibal threads a hand through his hair.

Hannibal smiles as Frederick Lounds enters his office, dressed in a rather ugly, brash golden suit, a shirt the color of burned orange, and a thick scarf tucked into his jacket that is reminiscent of oceans in stained glass. It makes his jaws appear more bulging like a frog.

"Thank you again for agreeing to meet with me, Minister!" he says jovially, and takes Hannibal's offered seat.

"It's no trouble, Mister Lounds," Hannibal replies cordially. "Can I offer you something to drink?"

"No, thank you," Frederick replies, and falls silent as Will emerges from the corner of Hannibal's office. He's as a wolf, large and hulking and utterly without sound, and follows Hannibal around his desk, sitting on his haunches, large enough that he can rest his head beneath Hannibal's hand. Frederick blinks at Will, and Will stares right back.

He clears his throat. "A fine animal," he murmurs. Whether he assumes Will is a familiar, or a pet, Hannibal doesn't care to ask, but he takes great pleasure in the wary way Frederick's eyes linger on Will. Feels, against his chest, Will's pendant pulse with similar satisfaction.

"Thank you," Hannibal replies, and pets over the soft fur between Will's eyes, between his ears. Will purrs, lashes lowering, his tail wagging slowly from side to side. "Now, Mister Lounds, I'm afraid I don't have a lot of time – please, ask any question you wish of me. All on the record."

Frederick nods, and drags his eyes from Will, meeting Hannibal's sharp gaze. He clears his throat again, and his chair creaks when he shifts his weight.

"I suppose there is the ultimate question, Minister," he says, and arches his brows in a way that reminds Hannibal sharply of Freddie, his sister. "What, exactly, is the end game for all these motions you are carrying out? Abolishing underage monitoring, moving to stop animagi registration – and I hear now you're gathering up support for a motion to allow house elves freedom of work choices, so that they will no longer be bound to a household, or a line of work, and enter into their duties voluntarily." His head tilts. "One can't help wondering where it will all end."

Hannibal's smile widens, and shows his teeth.

"Mister Lounds," he purrs, "I'd like to ask you something, before I answer." Frederick nods, mouth thinning with impatience. "I knew your sister for a long time, both as a classmate, and then later, as a colleague. Further still, as an employee of mine when I was Headmaster." His head tilts. "She has recently made a name for herself in the sniffing out and dissolving of dark supporters – both those loyal to the previous dark lord, and eagerly seeking the prophesied new one."

Frederick frowns. "Is there a question in there?" he asks.

Hannibal spreads his hands out in an open, appeasing gesture. "I simply cannot help noticing that most of her efforts have resulted in the incarceration or harm to those…less accepted, in our world. The outcasts, the young. Your family, it seems, clings strongly to tradition."

"There's nothing wrong with being proud of your history," Frederick says, rather curtly.

"Of course, of course," Hannibal replies, quiet and soothing. He sighs, playing the role of tired, over-extended bureaucrat, and feels Will's amusement through their bond. "I will answer you plainly, then, Mister Lounds – my goal, ultimately, during my role as Minister, is to allow every citizen with ties to our world to be allowed the freedom to simply exist."

"They exist already," Frederick says sharply. "You are just giving the undesirables more freedom, more power."

Will's mindset turns dark, and Hannibal pets him before he can snarl. "Say that you are right," Hannibal murmurs. "Let us consider, for a moment, that there is some young wizard out there who, now that he or she is free to do as they please without fear of being monitored, is doing some terrible things." Frederick's lips purse. "Consider, then, what that kind of freedom might mean. It means confidence, my friend; when people don't think they are being watched, they behave as though nothing is watching them."

Frederick frowns, and his head tilts.

"The dark lord of old was a clever boy, a bright student, praised by his classmates and teachers. No one knew what he was capable of, until it became too late to stop him. He gathered followers in the dark, in secret, and caused what could only be called a genocide." Hannibal smiles. "What if that same boy had all his friends, and proclaimed loudly what he intended to do, who he intended to become. People are less aware of the consequences of their actions when they don't believe there are any."

"So…you think by giving freedom to any and all, we'll catch more criminals?" Frederick says, and frowns deeply. He shakes his head, and huffs a strained laugh. "Forgive me, Minister, but that sounds utterly foolish."

"And you'll forgive me for disagreeing, Mister Lounds," Hannibal replies calmly, smiling wide. "I have not removed any punishments, just restrictions. And, regarding the house elves – they are the lifeblood of our houses. They see and hear so much, and through loyalty to their masters, are forced to be silent. How many sins are being committed that we will never know of until it's too late?"

Frederick's frown deepens. "Do you mean to turn them all into spies?" he asks, spluttering.

"Of course not," Hannibal says with a wave of his hand. "This is all conjecture."

Frederick blinks at him, and now he is not just frowning, but scowling openly. "Conjecture," he says, and shakes his head again. He stands, abruptly, and sighs. "Well, thank you for your time, Minister. I think I have all I need here."

Hannibal nods, and rises, shaking his hand. "Have a good day, Mister Lounds," he purrs, and walks the man out. When he turns away, the door closing, Will rises, and pads over to him, and puts his muzzle in Hannibal's hand.

"Proclaim loudly what you intend to do, huh?" Will asks, laughing. His tail is wagging wildly, for he knows what Hannibal is thinking. "Ring a bell and blind the sheep."

Hannibal smiles, and kneels down in front of him, kissing his smooth forehead. He cups Will's face and closes his eyes, soaking in the feeling of his mate's excitement, the deep, warm ache he gets before he hunts.

"Be safe, my love," he whispers, and rises again, letting Will go. Will grins at him, and with a small exertion of his will, disappears from sight, aparating as easily as if he were a man with a wand. Against his chest, his pendant burns brightly, and Hannibal touches it with a smile. "Happy hunting."

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will spends most of the day after he returns from re-marking his territory with Hannibal and Abigail. First, watching them as Hannibal teaches her how to properly break eggs, how to whisk them with milk into a pale, yellowish froth. How to properly fry and then bake strips of rib meat so it resembles bacon. She doesn't ask what animal it comes from. Hannibal never tells her.

Will sits with Winston, carefully licking the blood from his paws and exerting his will along the wounds in his chest, silently healing himself so he doesn't bleed out everywhere or get sick from the jaguar's claws. Winston lies next to him, cleaning Will's scruff and back, where Will won't be able to reach himself, as Will carefully fits his teeth between his toes and works his tongue in the self-made space, licking them clean.

His ears perk up when he hears Hannibal's voice, a little different than the soft instructions he has been giving, and he looks up when Abigail emerges from the doorway. They've given her some of Will's clothes that positively swamp her, but Will likes the scent of himself on the girl, naming her as one of his pack. His tail thumps on the ground.

"Hannibal wants to know if you want biscuits," she tells him.

Will grins at her, and nods. She turns around, but doesn't disappear for long, emerging again when Hannibal bids her go. She walks over to Will and plops herself down right in front of him, almost on his front paws, and puts her chin in her hands, leaning close so she could kiss his nose if she wanted to.

Will's ears perk up again, and swivel forward.

"My dad liked being a cat more than a person," she says, and tilts her head. "He said that was his true self, that it suited him better." Will blinks at her, and lets his big head rest in her hands when she drops them, idly petting his cheeks.

"Is that why you like being a dog, too? Does it suit you better?"

Will's nostrils flare, at the scent of bacon and eggs and quick-rising biscuits. Hannibal normally makes them from scratch, but he must be feeling particularly hungry or impatient, as Will sees the platters of food float out of the kitchen and settle on Will's modest dining room table.

She lets Will go, standing as Hannibal emerges with a trio of plates, forks, and knives, and she helps him set the table as Will stands, stretching so his back arches high and his forelegs slide along the floor. Then, he shakes himself off, and melts back into a man.

Hannibal smiles at him, and takes him by the hair, kissing him chastely. "Hello, my love," he murmurs, since he didn't get the chance to greet Will properly before, what with all the excitement of Will bringing him a child.

"Water?" Will offers, and looks to Abigail. "I have juice, too."

"Apple?"

"Of course." She grins at him, toothy and wide, and Will smiles back, and parts from Hannibal with a nuzzle to his shoulder. He gets three glasses, fills them halfway with ice, and pours Hannibal and himself water, and Abigail her juice, and brings them back. Winston has curled up beneath the table and Abigail has her feet on his warm flank.

For a while, they all eat in silence, and then Will clears his throat. "I like being a dog," he tells her, and Abigail blinks at him, like she expected him to just let the conversation drop and never speak of it again. Will imagines that's much better suited to a cat-like mindset. "But I don't…*want* to be a dog. I appreciate the anonymity and lack of attention."

Abigail nods, crunching noisily on a strip of bacon. "You don't like drawing attention to yourself," she says, and Will smiles at her. Her bright eyes slide to Hannibal, who is sitting across from her, Will between them. "Can you change shape too?"

"No," Hannibal replies, shaking his head. He gives Will a fond, adoring smile. "I have no issue with bearing the weight of someone's attention in Will's stead."

Will rolls his eyes, but he's smiling.

"How long have you two been mated?" she asks.

"Years, now," Will replies. "We were friends before that; we met when I went to Hogwarts. Hannibal was already there."

"Wow," she murmurs.

Will sighs through his nose, and looks at Hannibal. "Did Jack offer you what I think he was going to offer you?" Hannibal nods, and Will sighs again. "When do you start?"

"He offered us both a position," Hannibal replies. Will frowns, tilting his head. "I will be head of Ravenclaw and potions master. You, the groundskeeper. Even the 'Care of Magical Creatures' professor if you so desire."

Will huffs. "I'm not qualified to teach," he says, and shakes his head. "And I haven't accepted that offer."

Hannibal eyes him, for a moment, but must decide he doesn't want to force the issue in front of Abigail, so he nods, and turns his attention back to his food. They eat in relative silence, and when the plates are cleared, Will stacks them in front of him, but doesn't rise to put them in the sink.

He sighs, and looks at Abigail again. "We'll need to get you some better-fitting clothes," he says. She grins, and picks at the big, worn circle of Will's sweatshirt collar, which is so large on her it droops to her chest. "And anything else you might need – bedding, toiletries, all that."

She blinks at him. "I can stay with you?"

"You told me you didn't have any other family," Will replies with a shrug. "If you want to go to the State, I can't stop you, but if you don't, you're welcome here."

She blinks at him again, and Will tenses as her eyes brighten, and well up with tears. She pushes herself to her feet and throws herself into Will's arms, clutching him tightly as children do, her tear-streaked face tucked to his neck.

"Thank you," she says, and Will smiles, purring gently to soothe her, and wraps a hand in her dirty hair because it's so soothing when Hannibal does it for him. He holds her tight with his other arm and hugs her, letting her snuffle and sniff until she's wrung herself dry.

"Come now," he says gently, and cups her face, wiping the tear tracks from her red, puffy cheeks. "There's a spare bathroom upstairs, and I'll get you some towels and more clothes so you can clean yourself up. Then I think a good long nap is in order."

She nods, and Will leads her upstairs and leaves her to her own devices after he fetches her towels and some clean clothes. He finds Hannibal downstairs, rinsing the dishes, and comes up behind him, rubbing his cheek between his mate's shoulders.

"You have always had a softness for strays," Hannibal says. His tone isn't scolding, neither is it unkind. It is fond, rather, and Will smiles and wraps his arms loosely around Hannibal's stomach, content to hold him while he washes his dishes.

"I killed her father," Will replies. "She's mine now. And yours, too."

Hannibal hums, and settles a damp hand over Will's, petting lightly before returning to his task. "I always quite liked the idea of being a father," he says softly. "Even though I knew, with you, it would never be through natural means. And I quite like her – she's a buoyant and intelligent child, even with her trauma."

Will grins, and tilts his chin up to nip at Hannibal's hair, laughing when he receives an exasperated huff in answer. His arms tighten around his mate. "If you go teach, will you leave us here all alone?"

"At the risk of starting another argument, I would much rather you were there with me," Hannibal replies. He shuts off the water and dries his hands on a nearby dishtowel, and then sighs, braced against the counter, as Will presses close with a low rumble.

"You know how I feel about that place," Will says, sullen and low. "About Jack."

"I know," Hannibal replies with another sigh. "But I also know how you feel about us being separated. I have to stay on the grounds, Will, to make sure if the students need anything,

they can come to me."

Will presses his lips together, and closes his eyes, kissing Hannibal's shoulder. Hannibal's dry hands settle over Will's again, and he tilts his head, giving Will room to nuzzle his neck and breathe in his scent. "Groundskeeper, huh?" Hannibal smiles, and nods. "We'll need to take Abigail with us. Jack will need to know she's mine."

"I'm sure he will be able to accommodate," Hannibal purrs, and finally turns in Will's arms, gently cupping his face, scratching nails along his scalp, down his neck – petting him, as Will so loves. Will's lashes lower and he lets out a happy rumble, nose to Hannibal's cheek. "He was very insistent I come teach."

"Well, that's what you get for making a name for yourself with alchemy," Will replies. "I wonder what dear uncle Jack would think of your homegrown ingredients." The plants Hannibal keeps behind Will's house grow luscious and strong, fed as their caretakers are, on the flesh of fellow man.

Hannibal cups his face and kisses him deeply, growling when Will purrs, settles his hands on his mate's hips, claws flexing through his clothes. He pulls back, hearing the water shut off, and looks up to the ceiling. "Can you stay?" he asks. "Or does Jack demand your answer now?"

"I'll send him an owl," Hannibal says, grinning when Will laughs. "The school year does not start for several weeks, and I told him no matter what we decided, I would not be persuaded to come any earlier."

He pets Will again, knuckles to his cheek, and sighs. "I have missed you dearly, darling."

"It's been scarcely a day," Will replies, laughing.

"Not what I meant," Hannibal says, and Will knows, exactly, what he meant. Hannibal's eyes lower to his mouth, as his thumb does, gently coaxing Will's upper lip to rise at the corner, showing his canines, which undoubtedly still have a clinging line of blood around the gums. Hannibal pets to the corner of his mouth, his eyes so, so dark. "Hunt with me," he commands. "Tonight."

Will wants to – in the wake of Hannibal's dark, wanting gaze, Will burns. "Abigail," he whispers; a meek protest.

"Winston can watch her," Hannibal replies. "Or…perhaps, if she is so inclined, she could join us."

Will blinks, brow creasing. He looks up, and worries his lower lip between his teeth.

"We need not think on it now," Hannibal says. "We will take her and get new clothes for her, and everything she needs to be comfortable. Then, tonight, before we leave, we will give her a choice, but so that she understands that, regardless of what she chooses, she is welcome with us."

Will nods, and relaxes, nuzzling Hannibal's palm.

"I love you," he whispers.

"I love you too, darling," Hannibal replies, and kisses Will once more, his touch on Will's chin to get him to lift his head, and Will feels hooked, speared in place, helpless but to follow wherever his mate leads. "Come – you must change, and shower also, unless you'd like to be an animal when we go."

Will considers it, and shakes his head. "I need to be able to talk to her," he says, and lets Hannibal guide him to the stairs. "Do you know of any spell that would let me? And you, as well. I think, when at that school, I will not want to be a human at all."

Hannibal's lips purse, his eyes lifting as he searches through his memory. "There are several crystals that help in the practice of communicating with spirits. I think with the proper incantation, they could be persuaded to pass messages between living people. I will conduct some research."

Will smiles, warmed. "I want two," he says. "One for you, one for her."

Hannibal nods, and Will looks up to see Abigail at the top of the stairs. She has a new sweater on, this one older, one of Will's, so it's not *quite* so huge on her, but still goes to her knees. A pair of Will's sweatpants cover her feet entirely, so she looks less like a person and more a shapeless mass of cotton.

Hannibal smiles, and holds his hand out to her. "Come," he says. "I think I can persuade these to fit a little better, before we get you something more suitable." Will smiles at her as she passes, and presses his nose to her wet, black hair, and she grins up at him, before Will ascends the stairs and goes to the shower.

He cleans himself off quickly, dresses in jeans and a t-shirt and plaid over that, and pulls on socks, rucking his fingers through his wet hair as he returns downstairs to find his boots. Abigail is sitting beside Winston, petting him with both hands. The clothes she has on are still clearly not made for her, but Hannibal has added some stitching at the sides, and rolled up the sleeves and legs and the bottom of the sweater, binding it with thread he conjured with magic, so she no longer looks like quite the hapless orphan.

She has braided her hair, and has it sit to one side, so that the cut around her throat is less obviously seen.

Will lets out a quiet, concerned noise, and goes to her, kneeling down in front of her. "Does it hurt?" he asks, and gestures to her neck. "Hannibal is very good at potions and poultices – I'm sure he could make something that would lessen the pain, or remove the scar entirely."

She looks at him, for a long time, and then says; "I don't want it to be removed." Will blinks at her, and tilts his head. "My father gave this to me. My mom made that quilt. It's the only things I have left of them, and I…think it suits." She meets Will's eyes steadily. "My mom was comforting, but soft. My dad, vicious and mean, but protective, in his own way." Will

presses his lips together, and looks down at Winston when the dog huffs and shoves his muzzle against Will's thigh. He smiles, reaching down to pet his head.

Hannibal is in the kitchen, packing away the rest of the food into Will's fridge. Since they graduated, Hannibal and Will consolidated their lives and most of their things in Will's house, which he inherited from his father after his death. Hannibal has worldly possessions, just very little need to keep them with him – when one can aparate across the entire world with a flick of a wand, behaviors like hoarding become rare. He will occasionally fetch books or music from his uncle's villa in France, but not much else. Will knows his family owns a castle, far away in Lithuania, and though he has lavish things there, he never visits, and Will never goes because he doesn't want to go there without Hannibal.

"I never knew my mother," he tells Abigail quietly, meeting her eyes. "My dad never talked about her, either. I'm glad you had one that was good to you."

Abigail sighs, and nods. She gives Winston a few more cursory pats, and then pushes herself to her feet. Will grins to see that Hannibal had fashioned her a pair of shoes that look more like theatre slippers than anything else.

Abigail takes his hand as Hannibal emerges from the kitchen, and he gives them both a warm smile, and approaches Will, curling a hand in his hair and kissing his forehead. "Shall we?" he asks, and looks at Abigail. She nods, and Hannibal takes his wand out and, with a flick of his wrist, they all aparate to the wizarding half of New Orleans, since that is closest and, truthfully, the barrier between the wizarding world and the muggle eye is the thinnest on Earth.

Hannibal blinks, entering Will's homestead by the Forbidden Forest to find a scene like the library vomited all over the place. There are reels of parchment, huge sheets of paper covered in long, scrawling black script in all kinds of handwriting, hinting that Will has been reading through any and all books he can. Within the center sits his mate, cross legged, a huge tome in his lap as he pulls another stack of parchment to him, glaring down at the words like their existence frustrates him greatly.

He closes the door, and sees Winston is not with Will. Will looks up, his eyes wild, and presses his lips together when Hannibal merely stands, on the edge of his halo of papers, and tilts his head. He looks down at the pages in his lap, and runs a sheepish hand through his hair, rubbing the back of his neck.

"Should I come back later?" Hannibal suggests.

"Don’t you dare," Will snaps. He shakes his head vehemently, sucks in a hard breath through his teeth, fingers of his free hand curling around the book. "There's nothing here. Nothing. Decades, *centuries* of knowledge and nothing to *help*."

"What are you searching for, Will?"

Will looks up again. He is using lanterns, today, wary of an open flame around so much paper, and the fire looks like an open, gaping mouth, ready to swallow their words and belch it into the air. He holds out a hand, and Hannibal goes to him, careful not to trod on any parchment, and Will clears away a space where he can sit beside him.

Will hands him the book, and Hannibal's brows rise. "This is…the Ministry's registration of all known animagi," he says, reading the fine print along the top of the page.

"They sort by name," Will says. "Not by type. Fuckin' useless."

Hannibal's head tilts again, scouring the rows and rows of names. He doesn't bother asking how Will got his hands on an official record like this – Will has his ways. It lists name, birthdate, registration date, and animal type for each person. Most of them on this page are dogs, cats, or some kind of bird species that he can see.

"What are you looking for?"

Will presses his lips together again, swallows harshly, his eyes skating sharp and dark over the rings of scattered pages, books both thick and thin, scrolls in various stages of unraveled, and his own notes. "Animagi reflect the inner nature of the person," he says. "I remember reading that, in class, in the books they gave us. But…" His brow creases. "You'd think there would be *someone,* somewhere, in all the history of the world, who wasn't just a cat, or a dog, or whatever else."

Hannibal hums.

"I mean, why can't you turn into a unicorn? Or a Goddamn, I don't know, a hinkypunk? Or…" He swallows harshly.

"Or?" Hannibal says.

"A dragon." Will blinks, and turns to look at him. Hannibal cannot look away, and his lips purse in thought. "Do you think it's possible? That there exists a nature so volatile, so bright, that the creature it becomes could be like one?"

"It would be very difficult to hide, if that were the case," Hannibal says. "Even now, dragons seldom exist outside of sanctuaries or captivity."

"Abolish that law," Will tells him, and settles a hand on Hannibal's wrist. "If this thing thinks he must hide, we must make him think it's safe to come out. I spent the whole day in the forest and saw nothing, smelled nothing but ash. I couldn't find its nest, I couldn't find *anything*, but I know it's there."

Hannibal takes his hand, and kisses it. "You would have me give this creature freedom?"

"Not just him," Will replies, shaking his head, "but yes. Evil lingers in the darkness, Hannibal – we must make it think that it's safe to come into the light." His head tilts. "How long before you think Jack will retire?"

"I do not know," Hannibal murmurs, and lifts his shoulders in a shrug. "I think it would take something drastic to make him consider it."

Will's eyes flash. He hums, and looks away. "How is his wife?"

"Well, I believe."

"We should change that."

Hannibal's head tilts, and he smiles widely. "How, my love?"

"Without magic," Will says, and nods. "Muggles poison themselves effortlessly, all the time. We are all still cells, biology, even if some of us can use magic and some cannot." He smiles, and looks back to Hannibal, squeezing his hand. "Leave it to me. You'll be Headmaster before you know it."

Hannibal smiles, warmed at the excited light in Will's eyes. "Perhaps you should be the one ruling the world, my love."

"I have no desire to sit on a throne," Will purrs, and leans in to kiss him. Hannibal cups his face, feeling the warmth burning beneath Will's skin, his mate's passion and vibrancy soaking into his palm. "But I'll make sure the way is clear for you."

"The problem with prophecies, as many have said, is that they are all open to interpretation." The voice belongs to a man with more pomp than sense, who sits like a stuffed turkey and gobble-gobbles at nothing with all the authority of God.

"They are also, very commonly, recited out of order," says the current Minister.

"Oh?"

"Of course. Time is not linear, why should prophecies be?"

Within the little circle, there is a laugh, and a bright smile from a man so beautiful he looks like a statue. "A pity. To think this could have all been avoided."

"Then let us make sure it doesn't happen again!"

"Yes." A smile, then, wide as wide can be. "Let's."

Chapter End Notes

so, uh, with this chapter I officially have 2 million posted words of Hannigram (I've written more but can't post yet). so that's cool.

Chapter 9

A beast unlike any foretold;
Wreathed is he in fire and gold.
The boy of ice will stake his claim
For frostbite may burn just the same.
There still is hope, in summer's thaw
From darkness with her open maw
There comes a cry, a clarion call
That will devour one and all.

It is in the fifth year of school that students are taught about the Patronus charm, and practice trying to solidify and summon their own. Although, dementors are practically unheard of nowadays, remembered only as ghost-like tales people tell each other to scare their children, that guard the gates of the infamous Azkaban.

At the time, Professor Fell was the 'Defense Against the Dark Arts' teacher, and was one of Hannibal's favorites, but he will admit he spent a grievous amount of time considering how he might peel the man's skin from his weathered, kind face if he kept looking at Hannibal with that vague, understanding disappointment.

Will, of course, being younger than him, hasn't begun to learn it yet, but Hannibal is certain he will master it with ease, as he does so many other things. Already Will has been using wandless magic, and consulting books not even Hannibal for all his curiosity has dared to touch – stolen from the restricted section, since Will has a remarkable ability to sweet-talk the librarian.

He wants Will to succeed, of course he does, but that desire only further draws attention to his own failures.

He sighs, and rubs his hands over his mouth, digging his fingertips into his cheeks, and sits, staring out across the Quidditch pitch as he watches some first years figure out their brooms for the first time. He stands, after a moment, and rolls his shoulders, going to the staircases and heading down to the vast field that stretches between the pitch and the school. It's exam season, and so classes for years five through seven are much lighter, and it means he has a lot more free time than he's used to having.

His attention is caught by the appearance of a familiar shape, at the edge of his vision. He smiles as Winston comes into view, from the edge of the Forbidden Forest. He barks at Hannibal, ears perked up and tail wagging wildly, and lowers his chest to the ground, enticing him to come play.

Hannibal looks up, and around, searching for Will, but does not see him. Of course, Will is still a fourth year, and likely in class.

Winston barks at him again, more insistently, and Hannibal tilts his head. He approaches the dog, and when he is mere feet away, Winston jumps up, then to the side, and turns and sprints into the Forest. He stops, a few trees in, turns around, and barks at Hannibal again.

Hannibal sighs, but smiles. If nothing else, it will prove an entertaining story to Will when they are able to spend some time together, whenever that happens to be.

He follows Winston in, relying on the daylight and the open area, and the dog himself, to ward away any of the fouler things that live in the forest. He passes a family of thestrals and nods to them, conjuring a dead rat with his wand and tossing it to the foal, who chirps, leathery wings fluttering, and eats it whole. The mother whinnies at him, and Hannibal throws her another, seeing that what little stomach she does have is swollen with her next child.

"Grow strong," he tells her, and continues on, when Winston huffs insistently at him. Winston slows, trotting ahead of him now, tail wagging as he snuffles at the dirt path he is leading Hannibal on. Soon, the trees grow denser, their boughs thickly-clustered, casting Hannibal in the muted grey light of fake dawn. He shivers, for it is cold beneath their watchful branches, but he is not afraid.

Winston leads him towards what looks like a fallen tree, but it has been sideways for a long time, and is overgrown with moss, with other creeping vines, like the Earth is trying to swallow the tree back up. It creates a giant ball of curling branches, some thin like the Whomping Willow, some so thick they could be trees on their own.

Winston sits, on the edge of it, and looks up at Hannibal, jaws parted and panting. Hannibal meets his eyes, and Winston licks his nose.

Hannibal tilts his head, and draws his wand. "Lumos," he murmurs, and raises it in front of him, the bright white light shining from the tip of his wand helping to clear away the haze and cobwebs, allowing him to see between the dark patchwork of vines and thin leaves. He sees, almost so small it's invisible, a tiny spark of gold.

"Maxima," he says, and the light brightens, and he sees the gold again. He steps closer, quiet and prowling, and kneels down at the edge of the cluster – no, the *nest*, he realizes. There is, surrounding the gleam of gold, feathers and twigs in a circle, cradling the thing like birds will do to protect their eggs.

It is too far inside for him to reach, and so he crouches as close as he can, pushing forward with his wand so he can peer at it. He thinks it's vaguely egg-shaped, and swallows, for there are only a few creatures he knows of that would lay an egg like that, and none of them, he thinks, would be welcome here.

He hears a heavy creak, like the groan of a slumbering beast, and flinches back when the vines twist and tighten, almost crushing his arm before he can pull away. The nest closes, so Hannibal can no longer see inside it, and the vines curl up tighter around the egg, clutching it like a mother would around her growing stomach.

He hears, as soft as a whisper and forceful as an earthquake; *Leave*. He could not say if the voice was male or female, human or creature, but it fills him, not quite with dread, but with a deep, seeping chill akin to fear.

He stands, and raises his wand, searching for eyes, for bared teeth, and finds nothing – nothing but Winston, who is staring at Hannibal like he's wondering why he's behaving so dramatically. Strange, that Winston is not reacting to the voice.

Hannibal clears his throat, and lowers his wand. "Forgive me," he murmurs to the Forest at large, and tucks his wand away. Winston's ears perk up at the sound of his voice, and he woofs quietly, and stands, trotting off in an entirely different direction from where they came.

Hannibal glares at the dog's back, and shakes his head as he finds the path, and heads back towards the school. Winston rejoins him, after a moment, and Hannibal shoots him another sharp look. "You could have gotten me into a lot of trouble," he tells the dog, scolding. Winston, in answer, licks his nose again and snuffles at the path.

Thoughts of the egg, and the voice, plague him for the rest of the afternoon. He contemplates telling Will about it, but eventually discards the idea – if Will were to find out, he would insist on investigating for himself, and Hannibal has no desire to risk his beloved's safety for the sake of mere curiosity. From what he has seen, he doesn't think it unlikely that the nest and egg would be gone, should he go searching for it again.

He sighs, and his grim thoughts melt away when he sees Will, flushed and harried and so adorably disheveled, as he emerges onto the little square at the front of the castle, and meets his eyes. Will grins, but he is with a cluster of Slytherins, and they are still keeping their friendship a secret, for now.

Still, Hannibal feels warm, just from the shred of eye contact and the taste of Will's joy. His fingers curl in a little wave, and he sees, before Will turns away to head to his next class, Will's hands drop, and one of them turns, to give a wave of his own.

Will stirs, at some point in the night, and rises from his place on Hannibal's chest. His eyes are sharp, his upper lip twitching in a snarl, hackles raised.

"Something's out there," he says.

Hannibal is on his feet before Will can say anything more. They dim the lights of the house and Will prowls to the door, opening it and stepping outside, fearless as always. Hannibal follows, his wand drawn and ready.

There are two black shapes within the darkness, and Hannibal raises his wand and conjures a soft beam of light, illuminating Winston's familiar form, and that of a woman he has never seen. She has dark skin, and thick black hair set in ringlets atop her head, held back by a golden headband. The rest of her attire is black, a large cloak melting into long skirts that

touch the ground. She is crouched in front of Winston, petting his sleek face, but her eyes are at some point above his head. She's smiling.

"Aren't you just a handsome devil?" she murmurs, and Winston huffs happily in response.

"Excuse me," Will says, and steps forward. Hannibal lowers his wand, sensing no immediate danger. The woman looks over at them, and blinks, and stands. "You shouldn't be here – it's dangerous this close to the Forest at nightfall."

She grins at them, her teeth shining in the light coming from Hannibal's wand. "I'm not afraid," she says lightly. Her head tilts, and Winston nudges her hand, asking for more pets. The sight apparently soothes Will, for he is no longer so obviously aggressive, and lets his shoulders lower. Lower still, as Hannibal gently rubs down his spine.

He blinks in recognition, stepping closer. "You're Reba," he says, and Will's eyes flash as well at the name. "You live in Hogsmeade, correct?"

"Yes," she says brightly. "My sister and I run one of the bookbinding shops. And you are?"

"Hannibal Lecter, and this is Will," Hannibal says. "We teach at Hogwarts."

"Oh!" Reba claps her hands together, her smile widening. "I know your names. My friends have told me about you." Her eyes slide to the direction of Will, where his voice came from, and then back in Hannibal's general vicinity. "I'm so sorry to have disturbed you. I enjoy the quiet, and often walk through the grounds at night."

She offers her hand, towards Will. "Recognize me?"

Will frowns, but steps forward, and gently takes her hand in both his own. He lowers his nose to her palm, and breathes in, and huffs, smiling, and lets her hand go. "I do. Sorry."

"I don't think we've ever met when you're a man," Reba says kindly. "I'm sorry I didn't make you aware of me. You must have thought all kinds of things, before you saw me!"

Will huffs, but doesn't deny it. "You shouldn't be out here, Reba," he says again. "Even if you're not afraid, there are things in the Forest that are dangerous, even to their friends."

She hums, like she knows this just as well as Will does. "I was just heading home when I met your friend," she says, and pets Winston's head again, smiling warmly. "I won't trouble you any further. Thank you for your concern, gentlemen, and have a good night."

"Do you need someone to accompany you home?" Hannibal offers. He can't imagine she will get lost, if she comes here as often as she claims, but it's polite to ask.

She grins at him. "I think I will borrow your friend, if that's alright," she says, and Winston barks, tail wagging swiftly from side to side. He presses his flank against her long skirts, practically purring when she bows down enough to scratch behind his ears.

Will smiles. "Of course. Have a good night, Reba."

"A pleasure to meet you both. Good night!"

And with that, she disappears. As soon as Will deems her out of earshot, his expression darkens, and his mouth twists into a rather mean-looking snarl.

Hannibal blinks at him, surprised. "Will?"

Will turns away, and goes back inside. Hannibal dulls his wand's light and sets it on the little table by Will's couch. He takes Will's face in his hands, and forces their eyes to meet.

"Will, darling, what's wrong?" he asks, surprised and troubled by Will's sudden change in demeanor.

Will swallows, and shows his teeth. He looks away, to the fireplace. "She smelled of ash," he whispers. "I know her scent – she wasn't lying, she's been here before. I just never paid attention because I knew she was, you know, friendly. But now…"

He pulls away with another low noise, running both hands through his hair. His shoulders rise, tense and tight, and Hannibal chases him as Will turns his back, flattens his hands on Will's shoulders and kneads at the knots of tension he finds.

He presses his lips to Will's flushed neck, sighing when Will shivers and tilts his head, exposing more of it. "Do you believe there's a dragon in the woods, Will?"

Will presses his lips together, his eyes dark and fixed forward. "No," he replies, after a long moment of silence. "I don't know what it is."

Hannibal nods, and runs his hands down Will's flanks, finds him shaking. "Should we tell Jack?"

"No." Will turns, then, and cups Hannibal's face. "We're not going to tell Jack anything. It's not going to be his problem, soon."

Hannibal's brows lift, and he tilts his head.

"He can't know of anything that would compel him to stay here," Will says, heavy with meaning. "I've already started with – with Bella." He swallows, a soft flicker of regret passing behind his eyes, before he shakes it off. "I'm not letting anything get in the way of where you need to be."

Hannibal smiles, resting their foreheads together. "I have always admired your determination, my love."

"It's easy to commit yourself to a cause you believe in," Will replies. He's smiling too, just the edges of his mouth turned up, but it's enough to see him stop snarling. He shivers, and runs his hands down to Hannibal's chest, pressing flat – not to push away. Will likes feeling Hannibal's heartbeat under his hands, beneath his cheek, against his teeth.

Will ducks his head and nuzzles Hannibal's throat lightly. "I'm tired," he says, and draws Hannibal in. "Come back to bed."

Hannibal smiles, and nods, though Will has no bed to speak of in his house. They go back to the couch and Hannibal lies down upon it, and Will presses close to him, their legs entwined, his cheek over Hannibal's heart. He sighs, and closes his eyes, purring as Hannibal gently pets through his hair, lulling them both back to sleep.

They buy Abigail more clothes than Hannibal thinks she has ever owned before, as well as textbooks suitable for a young witch before she starts school – lore, mythology, philosophy, ethics. Will smiles every time her eyes light up, and though money is certainly no object, Hannibal knows they have made a sizeable dent in his vault by the time all is said and done.

They take her home, and Will tucks her in and puts her to bed. She sleeps for almost an entire day, and when Hannibal returns to Will's home, he finds her curled up against his flank, Will in his dog form, her legs propped up over Winston's back, reading one of her new herbology books.

She looks up when he enters, and smiles brightly at him. "Hi!" she says.

"Hello, Abigail," he greets warmly. Will's ears perk up – he was obviously in the middle of a doze – and he lifts his head, huffing softly in greeting. Abigail's entire body moves as he does it, and she sighs, setting her book down and stretching out comfortably alongside him. Will purrs quietly, tail thumping against the floor, and nuzzles her hair.

"I have something for you," he tells them, and pulls from his bag two crystals, large enough to fit into his palm. One of them is a pale pink, the other a deep, opaque blue. Will's ears cock forward. "I consulted with one of my friends in Italy, who specializes in crystals, and she told me these two would be the best to help Will communicate with us while in his shifted form."

Will grins at him, and Abigail's eyes flash in interest. She clambers to her feet and joins Hannibal at the table. A moment later, Will stands, and stretches, before melting into his human form, and takes the third seat.

He holds out his hand and Hannibal gives him the crystals. He lifts them to the light, head cocked, and hefts their weight. "Did she say anything about how we're meant to enchant them?" Will asks.

Hannibal sighs. "Unfortunately, the art of communicating with living things through crystals is more a series of experiments than any true recipe, but she informed me that the methodology should be similar to communing with the dead."

Abigail hums curiously, and Hannibal smiles at her.

Will huffs, and sets the crystals down. "I don't know how to communicate with the dead," he says with an arched brow.

"I do!" Abigail says. Will blinks at her. "My dad and I used to do it, when his brother passed away. And then, when my mom died…" She swallows, breathing in shakily, and Hannibal and Will both reach for her, settling a hand on each shoulder. She blinks up at the ceiling, regaining her composure, and shakes it off. "Anyway, I know how."

"Well," Will says with a kind smile. "If you're willing to teach us, we're more than happy to learn."

She grins at them. "Okay! We'll need a few things." She begins rattling off a list of ingredients – thankfully, most of them are easily sourced; herbs and a certain spell book that can be found in Nocturne Alley reasonably easily. "And," she adds, "we'll need, um, body parts. Brain, and heart, and intestines."

She winces.

Hannibal smiles, and meets Will's eyes. Will smiles back, equally wide. "Don't worry," he purrs, and squeezes her shoulder. "I'll take care of everything."

Hannibal does not manage to master the Patronus charm until the day after Will visits him in France, during the Christmas break after Hannibal has graduated. The day after Will spent the night, the first time in their lives, and Hannibal learned how to make him shiver and blush all over; learned how to please Will, in his entirety, and learned the acute, precise satisfaction of having Will sweet and open for him, clawing at his back and crying Hannibal's name into his neck.

He did not understand it, before – how could he think of one specific point of pleasure, of joy, in his life, when from the moment he met Will every day has been streaked with gold and beauty. How can one find a single piece of happiness when the world is soaked in it?

It is Will's love, the abstract of it, the way it makes Hannibal's heart race and his head warm, that gives him the power. And when he manages, Will is there, and laughs in delight when his Patronus turns out to be an animal that looks very much like Will's Animagus form – a large, sleek-furred dog, silver and strong and as capable of great destruction and protection as the man he loves.

Will kisses him, when it is done, and Hannibal breathes him in deeply, crushes Will to his chest, and doesn't know how to cool the flames fanned high and bright in his heart.

"What is yours?" he asks.

Will smiles at him. "I can't do magic outside of school," he purrs. "Not yet." His eyes are bright with happiness, with love, and he tucks his fingers beneath Hannibal's chin, presses his thumb to Hannibal's lower lip, and teases him with another smile. "You'll have to wait and see."

There are a lot of things Hannibal has had to wait for, when it comes to Will, and every time it has been more than worth it.

"I'm sure it will be breathtaking," he murmurs, cupping Will's face. "Just as you are."

Will laughs, bright and happy and so beautiful, Hannibal could stare at him forever. Then, Will kisses him, and Hannibal's Patronus fades away with a howl that sounds like victory.

Chapter 10

"You're sure he's the boy?" Jack Crawford murmurs. He looks so much older than his years.

"No."

"No?" Jack demands.

In front of him, the Professor of Divination cowers, hand flitting to the metal piece keeping his cheek in shape as he is wont to do when he's nervous. "No," Chilton replies, and shakes his head. "The prophecy is…there's parts of it missing. We can't possibly be sure."

"Headmaster," Professor Brown says, smiling wide, "he's just a child. Surely you need not be so afraid of him."

"You Know Who was a child once, also, Matthew," Jack says darkly.

"We are in a time of prosperity!" Chilton says weakly, shifting in his seat, his lavender blue robes more of an eyesore than the gleam of his nervous sweat. "The Ministry has never been stronger, and there are so many safeguards and updated means of teaching – surely, if Will were the boy foretold to be the next Dark Lord, we would see signs of it?"

Jack's frown deepens, and he levels Chilton with a withering stare. "*Will* is not the boy I'm referring to."

They frown at him.

"Hannibal Lecter," Jack declares.

Professor Brown scoffs. "He's a bright child, certainly, but hardly has the makings for a mass murderer, wouldn't you agree? He's always so pleasant – not so Mister Graham." His head tilts. "There is a darkness in Will, I won't deny it – he's withdrawn and always so wild, galivanting off in the Forest at all hours."

"And he's a Slytherin," Chilton adds, nose wrinkling in distaste. "They have a certain reputation."

Jack sits back in his chair, grunting in acknowledgement. He doesn't say that it doesn't matter the house – children smart enough to demand their placement are not to be taken lightly, and when Hannibal was sorted, he and the hat were silent for far too long, and when the cry of 'Ravenclaw' rang out, it was more resigned than anything else.

"Perhaps," Matthew says slowly, his face splitting into a wide, charming smile, "it would be worth…watching him. I would be more than happy to keep an eye on young Mister Graham."

Jack nods. He doesn't mention, as well, that he has seen Will and Hannibal keeping close kinship, sneaking off when they think no one is looking. Perhaps getting close to Will is the

necessary price of getting close to Hannibal. "If you even *smell* anything that reeks of this prophecy, you're to come to me immediately."

"Of course, Headmaster."

Perhaps it would be worth looking at this prophecy again.

There will be born a boy of ice,
Within the darkness there is flame.

Oh, but no, this is all out of order. Let us reexamine;

Neither can live while the other survives. That prophecy claimed untold thousands of lives. Be wiser with this one, for he knows the game, and takes many mantles, answers to every name.

Pieces are missing, of course. It's not in the nature of prophecies to give away the entire gambit.

There will be born a boy of ice, within the darkness there is flame:
A beast unlike any foretold; wreathed is he in fire and gold.
The boy of ice will stake his claim for frostbite may burn just the same.

Behold, a threat! The boy of flame who knows too well both fear and shame,
Will eagerly kill the one with claim to the throne of iron, dragonsbane!

The boy born in fire whispers to his kin. Unnoticed and silent, the ice slithers in.
Rally now: without goodness, the darkness will win.

Quite a large section, missing here. Jack Crawford scoured all the prophecies he could to find it, but alas, success is not the way of the world.

There still is hope, in summer's thaw, from darkness with her open maw
There comes a cry, a clarion call that will devour one and all.

The boy of ice, thawed now and free, appears to all on bended knee.
But trust him not, turn not your back, for that is when the wolves attack.
Fiercely, they fight, their friend the night. The pack will rob the world of light.

Within a throne of gold and steel the Dark Lord sits, the subjects kneel.
They cry and cheer, one voice to hear, and bow their heads with eager ear.
The boy of fire, standing tall, will be the one to lead the call.

Be careful the ice does not thaw, nor the flames become too low.
If one should perish, the other wilt, Fate's river will cease its flow.
Two souls, conjoined, will never part, Ice and Fire: they see. They know.

Their souls entwined, Conquerors twice, one will hold the victor's name.
The other takes, will overcome, and make the Dark Lord's work undone.

Upon the destruction of the Hall of Prophecies, what is left of this one was tragically lost. The only remaining record is in the Hall of Records, and there exists two copies of this prophecy – or, at least, what remains of it. One is kept deep in the Ministry's archives. The second sits on the shelves of the Headmaster's office in Hogwarts.

When Jack Crawford retires, he takes it with him, before Hannibal can learn of its existence. There is something to be said for blind faith. Ignorance, as they say, is bliss.

It is only in his twilight years, babbling and grey, that the last shred of the prophecy in existence is revealed;

Heed what I say, and you will see,
This tale concerns not two, but three.

It takes several attempts and several bodies before Will manages to perfect the spell that allows him to enchant a crystal for Abigail and Hannibal, so that they can hear him when he's in his Animagus form. Abigail giggles when he pushes a 'Hello' at her, and claps her hands together.

"I can hear you!" she says, and Will grins, huffing happily, his tail wagging. She has adjusted wonderfully to life with them, and positively glows with happiness. Will never gave much thought to the idea of being a father – as Hannibal said, once Will saw him, he knew Hannibal was it for him and they can't make children the natural way – but he finds himself quite liking Abigail's presence. Her scent is sweet, her mind brilliant, eyes sharp, and he likes listening to the patter of her footsteps as she wanders around the house, or the sound of her voice when she reads aloud from her textbooks.

Hannibal smiles, and cups Will's face, pressing a kiss to his sleek forehead. "Well done, my love," he murmurs proudly. Will licks his fingers and shakes his pelt out, changing back to his human form so that he can give Hannibal a proper kiss.

"We'll have to experiment with distance," he says. "Once we're on the grounds I probably won't be able to project that far, when I'm in the Forest or whatever else."

Hannibal nods. "With time and care, I think we'll be able to refine and improve the spell so that it's possible," he says with another warm smile. Abigail runs over to them, throwing herself into Will's arms, and he grins, hugging her tightly, and kisses the top of her head. "Now, we must give some thought as to packing. The school year will start soon, and preparations must be made."

Abigail pulls back, frowning. "I'm not old enough to go to that school yet," she says quietly, biting her lower lip and thumbing at her pendant. "What's gonna happen to me, if you're both

teaching?"

"You can live with me in the groundskeeper's cabin," Will replies easily, though in truth he hadn't given it much thought beforehand, but he dares Jack to deny him that. He gives her a conspiratorial grin; "I can show you all the secret tunnels and cool places in the Forest."

Hannibal hums. "Perhaps," he adds lightly, "it would be worth attempting an Animagus charm with her, as well." He smiles at Abigail. "If you're willing."

She gazes up at him with her big, bright eyes, wide with wonder.

Will frowns. "She can't do magic outside the grounds," he says. "The Ministry will notice."

"Yet magic performed inside the grounds goes entirely unmonitored," Hannibal replies with another easy smile. He settles a hand on Abigail's shoulder and squeezes gently, and gives her another soft look. "He was not much older than you when he managed to do it. Would you like to try?"

"Yeah!" she says, nodding eagerly.

Will huffs. "We can try," he concedes, and smiles at her. "It's a huge pain in the ass, though, and not a lot of people can manage it even if they do everything right, so don't feel bad if it doesn't work the first time. We can try as often as you like."

"Okay!" she says, and hugs them both again. "I'm gonna go pack."

Will shakes his head, watching her run up the stairs. "You know, part of me wants to discourage you from just agreeing to everything she says." Hannibal grins at him, and he rolls his eyes. "You're obviously going to be the doting parent."

"As if she doesn't already have you wrapped around her finger," Hannibal replies, and Will rolls his eyes again, sighing when Hannibal runs a hand through his hair, tugging gently, and pulls him into a gentle embrace.

Will hums. "If Jack says anything -."

"He won't," Hannibal assures him. "And if he does, I will deal with it myself. I don't want you worrying about anything." He kisses Will's forehead, and Will sighs. "I know it will be difficult for you, going back to that place, especially with Jack still in charge. I want to make this as easy for you as I'm able."

"And I know you will," Will murmurs. His fingers curl and he nuzzles absently at Hannibal's neck. Hannibal's arms settle in a loose embrace around his waist, and Will sighs again. "Did you ever think we'd go back?"

"Yes," Hannibal replies softly. "I think, however much we'd rather it be otherwise, our fate is tied to that place. It is a steppingstone to greater things."

Will smiles. "And you're all about 'greater things'."

"I want to remake the world for you," Hannibal says. "And if not for you, then for her. I think it's the duty of every parent, to leave the world in a better state than we found it, for our children, and our children's children."

Will nods. "I agree," he murmurs, and smiles again when Hannibal kisses him.

Hannibal sighs to himself, reaching down to idly rub his fingers through Will's scruff as Will lifts his head, ears perked forward, resting his muzzle on Hannibal's thigh. His tail thumps, once, against the floor, and he gives a little whine.

"Are you alright?" his voice whispers to Hannibal, a soft pulse of concern radiating through the pendant around Hannibal's neck.

Hannibal smiles, and brushes his thumb between Will's eyes. "Of course, darling," he says, seeking to reassure.

"You've been very quiet."

Hannibal sighs again, and sits back in his chair. "I think the late nights covering for Professor Gideon are catching up to me," he murmurs. Will hums in agreement – Gideon had been called to assist with a recent outbreak of polio in America, the American Ministry seeking help from him since he is so gifted with salves and poultices. He should be returning soon, but Hannibal quickly learned that Gideon is a fan of essays – long ones, and his workload for grading on top of Hannibal's means a lot of long nights tucked away in his office. And, since on Tuesdays and Thursdays Hannibal, Beverly, and Will are running the sexuality and biology group, he is robbed of two evenings where he would normally be able to keep pace.

"Can I help?" Will asks, and tilts his head, licking Hannibal's wrist.

Hannibal smiles. "If you'd like."

Will nods, and pulls back, shaking out his pelt and shifting to his human form. He sighs, straightening his clothes, and runs both hands through his hair, before he goes and fetches the second chair tucked in the corner of Hannibal's office, and drags it to the other side of his desk. Hannibal hands him half of the essays, as well as a quill and inkwell.

Will takes the first set of parchment, frowning down at it. "Eesh," he mutters. "Don't muggle English schools teach penmanship at all?"

Hannibal laughs. "Forgive me, darling, but you're hardly one to talk," he replies with a smile. Will glares at him playfully, and nudges his foot against Hannibal's under the desk. He sighs and flattens the page out, dips the quill in the red ink, and begins to grade as Hannibal turns his attention to his own stack. Despite the barely legible scrawl from the student, she clearly understands what she's talking about, and Hannibal only makes a few corrections before giving her an 'A' and setting her essay on the finished stack.

Will lets out a quiet, amused noise, and Hannibal looks up. Will meets his eyes, and grins lopsidedly. "Abigail's American upbringing is showing through," he says, and tilts the page so Hannibal can see their daughter's name. "She wrote about genetically engineering mandrakes to increase their potency."

"That's not solely an American thing," Hannibal replies.

"No, but I'm pretty sure no other wizard-born is going to be thinking of it any time soon," Will says. "They're all about the 'essence' of 'true magic', whatever that means." He rolls his eyes and flattens Abigail's essay down again.

Hannibal smiles fondly, turning his attention to the next essay. He is halfway through marking it when Will suddenly goes tense, his head snaps up and his nostrils flare, looking to the door. "I smell blood," he whispers, and before Hannibal can do anything but stand, there's a frantic pounding at the door.

"Dad!" It's Abigail, and he and Will rush to the door, opening it to reveal her, a young fellow Slytherin beside her, the girl extremely pale, an arm slung around Abigail's shoulders as she tries to keep them both upright. Abigail practically collapses, and Will catches her as Hannibal steadies the other girl – he doesn't know her name off the top of his head. There's a small trail of blood leading out of sight, and it's on Abigail's hands and dripping between the other girl's feet.

"What happened?" Will demands, gathering their daughter close as Hannibal takes the girl inside and shuts the door. As soon as it clicks shut, the girl shudders, her lashes fluttering, her dirty blonde hair matted with sweat. She collapses and Hannibal brings Will's chair over, sitting her on it. She droops to one side, her lashes low to show only slits of her eyes.

"Miriam was getting her period – she's not in the after-school group, but I tried to show her the spell to help with the cramps and bleeding and stuff, like you showed me. But something went wrong," Abigail says, all in one breath, her eyes wide and her scent sour with distress. "She just started bleeding all over the place. I don't know what I did – I swear I got it right!"

Hannibal presses his lips together, and flattens his hand on Miriam's stomach. He can feel heat coming from her, and the scent of blood is thick in the air. He frowns, doing his best to breathe through his mouth, and eyes the dark pool of blood dampening her pajama bottoms under her robe.

"We need to get her to the hospital wing," Will murmurs.

"No!" Abigail says quickly. "If Professor Lounds finds out we screwed up the spell, she'll shut the whole program down. It's my fault, I messed up." Hannibal sighs through his nose, and stands to grab his wand from the edge of his desk. He kneels back down in front of Miriam. "Can you help her?"

"I believe so," Hannibal murmurs. He puts his hand on her stomach again and draws his wand in a slow circle around it, brow furrowing. He isn't a healer, was never trained as one, but he can smell the blood on her and knows, intimately, all the ways a body can be torn apart on the inside.

In his periphery, he sees Will hugging Abigail, petting her hair to try and soothe her. "Did she take anything?" he asks.

Abigail nods. "I gave her some of my painkilling potion. I made it just this morning and used it on myself too, it should have been fine."

Hannibal swallows. "I believe she's having a reaction to the lotus," he murmurs, and draws his wand away. He closes his eyes and murmurs a soft healing incantation under his breath, feeling the warmth of magic pulse through his hand, into Miriam. She doesn't stir, but the heat radiating from her stomach lessens as Hannibal pulls his hand away. "A bad reaction can exacerbate bleeding, instead of lessen pain as it's meant to."

He stands, and goes to his shelf of medicines, herbs, and potion stores, taking out the ingredients to help promote healing and blood regeneration. Will waves his hand and the kettle by Hannibal's desk, sitting on an iron casket, begins to turn red, steam rising from the spout. Hannibal smiles at him, and pours the leaves into a cup, water atop it so the tea begins to brew.

He returns to Miriam, and waves his wand over the tea so it's cool enough to drink. He steps behind her and cups her chin, tilting her head up, and Will comes forward, holding her nose as Hannibal pours the tea into her mouth, forcing her body to swallow it instinctively. She coughs, and sputters, tea rising and spilling down her face. Her lashes flutter again, close, and she jerks, groaning softly.

"Miriam!" Abigail says, and flings herself over to her friend, touching her face as Miriam's eyes open wide, blinking in shock. "Oh, thank God, are you okay?"

"What happened?" Miriam rasps.

"You had a reaction to the spell – I'm so sorry."

Miriam groans again, wincing and hissing through her teeth, pressing her hands to her stomach. Her fingers come back pink, and they're shaking. She blinks up at Hannibal and Will, and Hannibal is glad to see her flush in embarrassment, because it means she has enough blood to spare it. Color is returning to her skin, and she squeezes her legs together and pulls her robes tight around her to try and hide the bloodstain.

Hannibal sets the cup back down, going to her and helping her sit more upright. "Take your time," he coaxes, smiling reassuringly as she blushes deeper, and gives him a sheepish look. "How are you feeling?"

"Better, thank you," she says meekly, wetting her lips. Her eyes dart up to Will, then to Abigail, before settling on Hannibal's face again. "I don't know what happened."

"Have you ever had a reaction to blue lotus before?" Hannibal asks her.

She frowns, and then shakes her head. "Not that I know of."

Hannibal nods. "It's used in Abigail's potion. I believe it's what caused you to have such a negative reaction to the spell," he explains. Her blush deepens further, her eyes sharpening as she comes back to awareness. Hannibal crouches down in front of her, and gestures to her stomach. "May I?"

She hesitates, and then nods, and pulls her robes away. Hannibal touches her stomach again, pleased to feel that it is no longer quite so warm. "The worst is past," he tells her. "And now you know."

She nods again. "Thank you," she murmurs, and tries to stand. Hannibal moves back so she has room, and Abigail helps her to her feet. She's no longer actively dripping blood, which is a good sign – the potion is just to manage the pain, but the spell itself stops the bleeding. She sways on her feet, but holds, and breathes out a soft sigh of relief. "I think…. I think I'm good."

"We need to get back to the dorm," Abigail says.

Will nods, and heads to the door. He whistles, sharply, and a moment later Winston appears, panting, tail wagging wildly. He has blood on his muzzle, and licks at it, and Hannibal smiles when he sees that there is no longer a trail of blood outside the door – he makes a good clean-up crew, if nothing else.

"Take Winston with you," Will says, and Abigail nods, giving Hannibal a relieved, thankful smile. She helps Miriam out the door, and Will puts his hand on the frame, watching them leave. When they're out of sight, he sighs, and closes it again.

"Are you alright?" Hannibal murmurs.

"Children shouldn't be afraid of seeking help just because *Freddie* -." Will stops, pulling himself short with a sharp hiss. He turns, and fixes Hannibal with a dark look. "I swear if she's been starting shit I'm going to take her deep in the Forest and let the wolves have her."

Hannibal huffs, smiling. Will returns to the desk, eyeing the stain of blood on the chair in dismay. He sighs, and runs his hands through his hair, and with another wave of his hand, the stain is wiped clean. As are the drops of blood on the floor.

"You'll get your wish," Hannibal murmurs. "One day."

Will nods, swallowing harshly, and takes his seat again, pulling the chair back into place on the other side of Hannibal's desk. "One day," he whispers, and Hannibal's smile widens. He goes to Will, pets through his hair, and kisses his temple, before he returns to his seat.

They pass the rest of the night in silence, and Will opens the door when Winston returns, and changes back into his wolfdog form when the work is done. Hannibal has a couch in his office, and he spends the night there, with Will and Winston curled up together on the floor. Occasionally, Will whines in his sleep, and only settles when Hannibal lets his hand fall, gently rubbing between his ears and easing him back into calm.

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Hannibal was elected into the position of Headmaster at Hogwarts, he, Will, and Abigail bought a small house in the middle of a sleepy muggle town, the kind of place buried deep in the moors that are only ventured upon by accident. Their house is a plain-looking structure of stone and slate, weathered and worn and growing moss on the sides of it. Will had seen it and instantly fallen in love with the place, with its rolling green hills surrounding it that grew so dense with fog at night, the large yard for Winston and any other stray creature that might venture into their midst, magical or otherwise, to play in and enjoy.

They still own Will's home in Louisiana, and ventured there during the school holidays, or during off seasons once Hannibal was elected Minister of the English Ministry of Magic. If Abigail needed to reach them, and they were not in their expected offices, she could easily find them in one of those two houses.

It is within the English house, while Hannibal and Abigail are enjoying a cup of tea and companionable silence, that Will aparates. He has a body slung over his shoulders, and dumps it in front of them like a birddog might return a pheasant to its master, dusting off his hands.

Hannibal's brows rise, as he takes in the corpse. It belongs to no other than Frederick Lounds, the pestering thorn in Hannibal's side since he became Minister.

He lifts his eyes, and Will grins at him. "I brought dinner," he says, and gestures to the body with another pleased rumble. Hannibal smiles, closing his book and setting his mug of tea to one side, and stands, going to his mate and petting through his sweat-damp hair. The air is humid outside, and as a result, the scent of blood clings to Will heavily. He presses his nose to Will's temple, breathing him in.

"Isn't that the reporter that kept harassing us?" Abigail says.

"He asked one question too many," Will replies with another shrug, shifting his weight. He is still in the mindset of the hunt, and Hannibal knows he wants nothing more than to continue to rip, and tear, into his kill, to revel in the victory with his mate and child.

Abigail's brow lifts, in a way so much like Will that it warms Hannibal to see it. "Professor Lounds will not be happy about the murder of her brother."

Will huffs. They all know what he thinks of Professor Freddie Lounds, and where she can shove various things like her opinions. He doesn't say anything, but his expression tells them what his tongue will not. Hannibal smiles, and continues to pet through Will's soft hair, kissing the part of it as Will purrs, happy and proud in his arms.

"We'd best prepare him quickly," he says after a moment, and Will nods, pulling away and hauling the body up again. Despite Mister Lounds' sizable bulk, Will lifts him with ease. "It would do no good for you to have given us such a fine harvest and have it gone to waste."

Will grins, and Abigail rolls her eyes, fond when she looks at Will, as always, and they follow him towards the kitchen – which, despite every other piece of the house Will loves, he must admit suits their needs much more capably, after they charmed it to be large enough on the inside to rival the size of those within old castles.

"Hannibal! *Hannibal!*"

Will's cry is loud, frantic, raw with panic as he yells for his mate, Winston beside him raising up a howl. Around them, flanking them, is a pack of wolves – great hulking things that ancient scholars would call Dire, giant beasts with snarling mouths and blood etched into every powerful muscle of their forelegs and shoulders, soaked deep into their wrinkled jaws.

"*Hannibal!*" he yells again.

Winston halts, suddenly, and lets out a soft whine, and Will turns to see where he is looking. Beneath a cascade of fallen rock is a woman, her long black hair familiar, as well as the broken crystal hanging from a snapped chain by her head. "Oh, God, no," he breathes, and runs to her, skidding to his knees hard enough to shred through clothes and right to the bone. He cups Abigail's head, noting only absently that she is not cold – her lashes flutter, she's still breathing, *thank God*. He cradles her head to his chest and pushes every half-remembered charm, every ounce of healing magic he can muster into her. Three of the largest wolves brace themselves against the rubble, smaller cubs and mates daintily picking up pieces of stone and removing them from her body. Will is no healer, but he knows from years with his mate how the human body is supposed to fit together. He can mend bone, re-knit torn muscle, repair ruptured organs. He pushes his hand to Abigail's neck and wills her heart to beat more strongly, for blood to stop leaking from her mouth and nose.

She surges with a gasp, her lashes fluttering and opening slowly, and Will sobs with relief, leaning down to rest their foreheads together as he pets through her dust-ashen hair, cradles her tender neck to make sure she doesn't strain herself. She winces, hissing through her teeth, and paws at his shoulder as she tries to sit up.

"Hey, it's okay," he says, though he cannot possibly keep his voice calm, and he's sure he looks even more panicked than he feels. The wolves and Winston surround them, their eyes on the sky. She blinks, once, twice, a third time, and shakes her head sharply as if to clear it. "Where's your father?"

"I…" She trails off, and Will presses his lips together and wipes a smear of blood from her chin.

"*Abigail*," he says sharply, drawing her attention. "Where is your father?"

Her eyes lift, and she winces. "He went after the dragon."

Oh, of fucking course he did.

Will stands, his eyes on the sky. All he can see are storm clouds, and he cannot tell which rumble comes from them, promising rain, or from the beast, who came with fire and vengeance and had laid to waste the outer walls of the castle within minutes. Without warning, without hesitation, he struck. There are fucking *children* here.

Children who are now cowering in whatever corner they can find. The braver and older ones have taken up stations with their teachers, watching the skies with stoic, grim determination. It makes Will think of old American propaganda, makes him think of the one and only museum in existence remembering the fallen in the time of the Dark Lord. No, he refuses to let that happen a second time.

He looks to the nearest group of students, who are being guarded by one of the Hufflepuff prefects. He looks to the wolves, and whistles sharply, jerking his chin towards the children. "Get them to the -." He pauses. No, they cannot go to the Forest, that's just kindling waiting to be lit. They cannot go to the Great Lake, and sit like ducks upon the shore, waiting for the dragon to return and devour them all. Where could they go, where a dragon would not follow?

He eyes the skies again, and then pulls Abigail to her feet, cups her face and makes sure she is steady, and somewhat focused, when he says; "Take them to the Room of Requirement." She blinks at him, and frowns. "I hid a port key there, when I was a kid. It's an old cauldron, doesn't look like much. It'll take you to your uncle's house in France. Take every student there and get them out."

She nods, expression turning steely – much like she looks whenever she is about to walk into the Ministry to battle yet another round against aged, weary men who would rather keep everything the same. Since Hannibal rose to power, so much has changed, but there is a certain unity, a certain clarity, in times of war.

He smiles, and kisses her forehead. "Go," he says, to both her and the wolves. She nods, and calls to the prefect.

"This way!" Abigail yells, and the wolves surround the children, herding them back towards the castle. "Everyone, this way! Follow me!"

Will watches them go, until the only wizards and witches remaining in the courtyard are reasonably capable of holding their own – professors, and students old enough to be on the cusp of graduating. He stopped paying much attention after Abigail graduated, and even less once Hannibal was elected to Minister, since their affairs rarely brought them back here. He cannot help wonder about the timing of the whole thing, that Hannibal was summoned to discuss some Ministry matter the same day the dragon struck.

He looks down at the ground, and picks up Abigail's discarded pendant, winding the chain tightly around his fingers. Even if he were to change to his wolfdog form, he knows Hannibal is too far away to hear him. He tries not to think about Hannibal, giving chase on a Goddamn

broom – a *piece of wood chasing a beast that breathes fire.* Tries not to think about Hannibal being caught in the flames and plummeting to his death. Hannibal is skilled in flight, he was a Quidditch player and Captain for years, after all, but there's only so much one can expect when fighting a dragon.

He cannot do it alone.

He looks down at Winston, finds him staring up at Will, ears perked forward, panting heavily, his nose twitching at the scent of ash and burning rubble around them. Will sighs, and kneels down, cupping his face and resting their foreheads together.

"You've been a faithful friend to me for years," he tells the dog, and Winston's tail wags, swishing to and fro. He licks his muzzle, and then Will's. "I have one more favor to ask you."

Winston woofs, softly. Will smiles, and lets him go, and Winston turns and bolts out of the courtyard, down the long, winding path that leads to the groundskeeper's house, and then the Forest. The house is no more, nothing left of it but a wide circle of black, smoking pieces. The dragon struck there, first, and Will doesn't think it was by accident.

Winston pauses at the edge of the Forest, sniffs the air, and then turns, running not towards it, but down the path that leads to Hogsmeade. Will's eyes find Gideon in the silent watchers. The years have not been kind to him, he appears old and grey as the sentinels that sit within the alcoves of the castle, who have not been called to arms since the last great war. Will hopes it doesn't come to that again.

He touches the man's shoulder, drawing his attention.

"We need to get the children out," he says. "Some of them may still be hiding."

Gideon's dark eyes flash, he presses his lips together, and nods, following Will into the castle.

Although Abigail is just as capable of sitting in silence with her fathers, reading from her textbooks or helping Will in the garden, she is also quite chatty, and so holding a mandrake leaf in her mouth for a month proves difficult for her. Will is patient, smiling indulgently whenever it slips from her tongue mid-meal, and she gives a huff of frustration.

"I told you it was difficult," he says, kissing the top of her head.

She rolls her eyes, her face set into an expression of grim determination, and merely holds out her hand for Will to give her another leaf. Will has planted mandrake in the soil of their garden, careful to warn her not to tug on their roots, lest she accidentally uproot one old enough to seriously harm her or anyone else in the vicinity. Winston has already learned that the hard way, when he nosed too deeply at a seedling and ended up fainting for a long while.

In the end, she does not finally manage the spell until she has graduated from Hogwarts, and Will finds himself opening the door and stepping outside to the sight of a thestral mare, the

pendant around her neck the only thing telling him that it is, indeed, his daughter.

She whinnies at him, her leathery wings beating at the air as she rears up, pride pouring off her as she bares her teeth at him, her skeletal head tossing and her skin shining blackly in the sunlight. It causes a strange surge of emotions in him; pride, of course, for her to finally have succeeded – but mostly a terrible sense of dread, for he remembers sitting on the floor of the groundskeeper's cottage, notes and records splayed around him, so sure, so doggedly certain, that is was indeed possible for an Animagus to take the form of something beyond the natural world.

Abigail, sweet and wonderful a child as she is, has taken the manifestation of death as her alternate shape. What kind of man or woman, he wonders, would take the shape of a dragon? It is that night he learns of Hannibal's foray into the Forest, where he saw the egg and heard the threatening voice tell him to leave. His sleep, for many nights after, is filled with fire and blood, and he wakes often, screaming and tearing at his own throat, and cannot let Hannibal touch him, for his touch burns, and Will must shed his pelt and run for hours as an animal with Winston, until the sun comes up, and he can return home. There is no danger in the daylight.

Despite Will's warnings, he finds Reba's scent often in the Forest, when he is out patrolling and making friends of every beast, both magical and manmade. Sometimes he sits with her by the fog-coated lake, purring as she pets through his thick scruff, content to simply be with someone who does not burn him, but settles him. Reba is known, here, and welcomed, for all her strangeness.

It is one such night when Winston will not come with him, no matter how much Will nudges and nips at him, and so he ventures in alone with a huff, marking his usual root, and he comes upon her at the lake. Her head tilts, and she smiles warmly at him in greeting, knowing the sounds he makes and the way he disturbs the air as he moves. Will goes to her, and sits, panting heavily, his breath misting in the cold air.

She shivers, and draws her cloak tighter around her shoulders, and says; "There have been strange reports coming from these woods." Will licks his muzzle, tilts his head and lets out a curious rumble. "People are talking, and saying there is a terribly dark beast that has taken up residence here." Will huffs again – he's sure there is no end to the monsters that might feel at home in this place. He counts himself among them. "They're talking of closing down the Hogsmeade borders, of not letting people out at night."

That makes Will perk up, and he turns to look at her. She reaches for him, and Will puts his nose to her palm, breathing out heavily as her delicate fingers curl beneath his jaw.

"Promise me you won't let them," Reba says. "I need to see him, Will. I'm the only friend he has."

Will frowns, and licks his muzzle again. He doesn't want to change shape, for the night is cold and he did not come dressed to ward it away. He merely licks her palm in answer, and she sighs, and lets her hand drop.

Hannibal lifts his head as the doors to his office fly open, pushed aside as if they are no stronger than sheets of paper. In storms Freddie Lounds, her mane of hair as red as her cheeks, her eyes bright with outrage and anger. Behind her, several of the Ministry guards, as well as the Chief of Magical Police, follow.

"Miss Lounds," he greets cordially, setting down his quill. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"My brother is missing," she hisses, and Hannibal blinks at her, tilting his head. "I know you were the last one he spoke to. You *and* Will."

"I have not spoken to Mister Lounds for several days," he replies coolly, "and I'm sure you can read the entirety of our conversation in his latest article." Beneath his desk, Will is sitting, curled up as a dog and warming Hannibal's feet. He lifts his head and snarls, too low for them to hear, his ears flat to his skull. Hannibal sends a pulse of reassurance to him, though it does nothing to make his mate settle.

"I know you did something," Freddie insists. "He never got around to posting his article. What did you talk about?"

Hannibal presses his lips together, and eyes the gathered men. "Am I under investigation, Miss Lounds?"

The Chief of Police, a man named Randall Tier, if Hannibal recalls, who followed Will so doggedly while they were all students, clears his throat and steps forward. "We're simply covering our bases, Minister," he says placidly. "It's not every day a man of Mister Lounds'… reputation…" He says the word carefully, and beneath the desk, Will huffs a laugh, "Goes missing. I'm sure you understand."

"Of course," Hannibal says, and spreads his hands out in a gesture of welcome. "I have nothing to hide. Mister Lounds and I simply discussed the recent motion to free house elves from indentured servitude. He wanted to know my thoughts on the matter, and I gave them."

Freddie's eyes narrow, and she strides up to the desk, bracing her hands on it, stretched wide. Hannibal supposes it is meant to look threatening, but she is so dainty and so insignificant in her power, he merely finds it amusing, like a fly has landed on his food, soon to be brushed away. "I know what your game is, Hannibal," she says sharply. "I know what you're trying to do."

"Please, then, enlighten me."

"You want a world of anarchy. A world where people like that mutt you call a mate -." Hannibal's chin lifts, and Will snarls, loud enough that he's sure Freddie can hear. Her eyes widen, and drop, as though she can see through the desk, and her lips twist into a smug, unhappy smirk. "If you have nothing to hide, then you have no reason to refuse taking Veritas Serum, and answering a few questions."

Hannibal clenches his jaw, and tilts his head. "If I am being arrested for something, then I would gladly submit to questioning," he replies. "However, unless you have any true reason for storming in here and insulting my friends, I must politely ask you to leave. I'm a very busy man."

"I know what you're doing, Hannibal," Freddie hisses, voice low. She leans in so that only Hannibal and Will can hear. "I know this isn't the first time someone's disappeared when they paid too much attention to you or your *precious* Will. I found Jack's journals. I read them all."

"I hope he's as good a storyteller as he was a Headmaster," Hannibal replies. He resists the urge to reach beneath his desk and smooth his hand over Will's head – he can feel Will's anger, sharp waves of it spearing through his chest, until it doesn't seem like a half-bad idea to simply wring Freddie's delicate neck and be rid of her once and for all. Will's thoughts are black, pulsing *kill her, let me kill her* through his lungs, darkening his heart and the edges of his vision. "Still, I'm not sure how Jack's journals relate to your brother's unfortunate disappearance."

Her eyes flash, and she straightens, lips pursed in sour aggravation. "This isn't over," she says quietly, dark with threat. She turns on her heel and strides out the door again, the gathered police parting from her like she's a barracuda passing through a school of fish.

Randall clears his throat again, and flushes, giving Hannibal an apologetic, grimacing smile. "Apologies for the intrusion, Minister," he says quietly, and turns, waving his people away. The doors swing shut behind them, and Hannibal breathes out heavily.

Will rises, prowling from beneath his desk, his hackles raised and his teeth bared in a savage snarl. He looks to the door, and then Hannibal, and says, "I'm going to kill her, one day." It is not a warning, not a threat – it's a promise.

Hannibal smiles, and nods, straightening in his seat and taking his quill in hand again. "I would expect no less."

By the time Will and Gideon have located all the students they can and ushered them to the Room of Requirement, they enter to find Abigail re-aparating with the port key in hand. The doors to the Room remain open, surrounded by a throng of dire wolves. Abigail gasps, stumbling in place – Will understands, it is quite a task to travel by port key, and wholly unpleasant on the nerves and one's sense of balance. He catches her as she lists sharply, helping her straighten, and lets out a soft, worried noise as she shakes her head and brushes him off.

"I'm good," she tells him, and looks to Gideon and the rest of the students.

"He can take it from here," Will says gently, and looks to the other man. "This leads to Hannibal's uncle's home, in France. They'll be safe there until the dragon is dealt with."

Gideon nods, pressing his lips together, and takes the port key in a cloak-covered hand so he doesn't aparate unintentionally. Will and Abigail leave the Room as he begins to call the students to him, so they can all leave. The wolves follow behind with a chorus of anticipatory growls.

"Where's Winston?" Abigail asks.

"I sent him to find Reba," Will replies. "She's the only one that can speak to the dragon."

Abigail blinks at him, frowning, clearly not understanding. "How do you mean?"

"I don't think he's a dragon at all," Will tells her, taking her hand and leading the way back down to the courtyard. The clouds have grown darker, and rumble more fiercely. Amidst them, Will can see something moving within them, swirling through the vapors. A streak of fire illuminates the clouds, a shadow suspended on dust, a great beast's silhouette within them. "Not a real one. Just as I'm not really a dog, and you're not really a thestral."

Abigail's eyes widen in understanding, and she looks to the sky. "Is…papa up there?" she whispers.

Will cannot see him, but he won't let himself assume otherwise, so he nods.

"We have to help him."

Will nods again, and winces internally at the thought of riding a broom. "If he's smart, he'll have burned all the damn broomsticks," he mutters. Even if he did not, the closet storing most of the racing and Quidditch brooms is down by the pitch, and too far away to risk going there unguarded.

Abigail nods. "I can fly," she says, and looks to Will. "I can take you up there."

Will shakes his head immediately. "I'm not letting you within a thousand feet of that thing," he says firmly. She opens her mouth to protest and Will levels her with the full force of his 'scolding parent' glare. "*No,* Abigail. You're not coming."

"I can't just let you both fight this thing alone," she hisses. "I want to help."

Will breathes out, and searches the courtyard. *He's not an animal*, he must remind himself. *He won't think like one*. He will not be lured by gold, not distracted by loud noises, but spells will affect him, for he is not truly a dragon. Assuming Will's theory pans out.

He nods to himself, and turns to Abigail, taking both her hands in his. "Fly to Hogsmeade," he tells her. The dragon will not think anything of a lone thestral mare fleeing from the fire. "Find Winston and Reba. Do you remember the lake, in the Forest?" She nods, her eyes wide. "Take her there. I'll do the rest."

"Dad," she whispers, when he tries to pull away. She holds him tightly, her eyes shining with worry – not quite fear, Will thinks he and Hannibal trained the fear out of her long ago. She has always been so brave; he could not ask for a better daughter. "If something goes wrong…"

Will shakes his head, and embraces her tightly. "Everything's going to be fine," he promises her, and when he pulls back, she has tears in her eyes, but the rest of her is stoic. "Fly fast, baby. Go on now."

She nods, and steps back, seamlessly melting into her Animagus form. Her wings spread out wide, and she snorts, whinnying sharply. Will gets out of her way, and she takes to the air with a single long stride and powerful leap, the heat and wild currents of the wind helping her gain height quickly, and she arches over the ruined walls of the castle and disappears from sight.

There is only one thing left to do. Will just hopes Hannibal is close enough, is alive, to hear it.

He changes into a dog, and barks to the get the wolves' attention, pleased when they turn to him and rumble in readiness. He turns, and leads the charge towards the Forest, gathers as much of his power and thought as he can, and sends to Hannibal;

"Bring him to the lake."

For a heart-stopping moment, he hears no answer, and then, soft as a whisper from far away, Hannibal says; "I'll meet you there."

He came out of nowhere, with a fierce roar and a jet of flame so bright that, even though his first target had been the groundskeeper's house, it was to be seen from the upper window of the classroom Hannibal had been in, and drawn his attention and that of Beverly, stopping them in the middle of their conversation.

Her face had gone pale, and she'd whispered; "Is that a *dragon*?"

He could not afford to hesitate, and had taken her broomstick and been in the skies before he could think about it – before he could warn Will, or Abigail, and the dragon met him in the clouds, snarling almost as if he recognized Hannibal, baring savage, straight-pointed teeth, another jet of flame bursting from him that Hannibal was quick to dodge, but only barely avoided.

He is a huge beast, shaped unlike any breed of dragon Hannibal is familiar with. He has four wings, not two, and is such a deep, beautifully bloody red, the kind that arcs fresh from a body, the kind that sits in the center of a dying star. His claws, membranes, and feathers on his tail are black, his horns sleek and shining ivory, his roar more like a cannon for how powerful it is.

Dragons are immune to non-physical magic, so Hannibal cannot paralyze him, cannot slow him down. His intention, at first, had been to simply keep him away from the castle, after the dragon had done his first sweep, destroying the astronomy tower and setting the courtyard ablaze. Though his first strike was clean and precise, the rest of his attacks came as a series of rage-filled, directionless fire, lighting up the walls and making the long bridge leading across the lake burst and crack in a cascade of black rubble.

When the wolves had come, the dragon had taken higher to the skies, and Hannibal gave chase.

The clouds brush against him, cold and slick, soaking his clothes to his body as he does his best to distract the beast, drawing it away from the castle. The dragon seems more than content to chase him, snarling and snapping at the buzzing little fly that keeps getting in the way. Hannibal cannot harm him, but he can summon obstacles, and draws piles of the rock from the ground, hurling them at the dragon in an effort to slow him down or otherwise incapacitate him. One of his claws is broken, now, the membranes of his wings torn, and there's a fresh-bleeding cut on his upper lip as he snarls, and sends another jet of flame Hannibal's way.

He hears Will's call, and presses his lips together, his eyes turning to the forest. The dragon snarls at him, snapping his teeth much too close to the bristles of Hannibal's broomstick for comfort, but the muscle memory of fast-paced Quidditch maneuvers comes to him easily, and he spins almost completely in place and, lacking anything else to throw at him, hauls the Whomping Willow up by its roots, and sends it in a messy coil of thrashing limbs straight into the mouth of the beast.

It roars, crushing the thick trunk between its teeth, and the tree whips at it fiercely, bruising its neck and jabbing at its eyes. The dragon snarls, fire glowing in its mouth, and breathes upon the tree, which grows black and stutters in place, branches twitching as the dragon burns it to ashes.

He fixes one large, golden eye on Hannibal, and rumbles in fierce threat.

Hannibal turns towards the Forest, and hastens to the lake. He knows how to find it on foot, but it is difficult to locate amidst the dense clouds of ash that have begun to gather like snow along the tops of the trees. But then he sees it – the familiar fog, though it seems much denser than usual.

He drops down through it, the dragon close behind. It crashes through the trees with another roar, loud and crushing the powerful oaks and pines beneath its weight. Hannibal is faster, and much more nimble, and lets the fog cloak him from sight as he flies through it, until he almost collides with the flank of one of Will's wolves.

He pulls up short, breathing hard as the animal snarls at him, but does not attack. There are three, gathered in a tight circle, around Abigail, and Reba – and, he notes with surprise, Freddie Lounds. He cannot see Will.

He dismounts from the broom, keeping as quiet as he can as he prowls to his daughter. Abigail looks at him, her cheeks flushed with outrage. The fog on the lake is blisteringly

cold, like stepping into a block of ice, and the three women are shivering with it. He wraps an arm around her shoulders.

"Freddie was holding Reba hostage," Abigail tells him in a whisper. "Threatened to kill her."

"Why are they here?" Hannibal replies.

Abigail shrugs. "Dad told me to bring her, so I did," she says. Winston appears at her side, woofing softly. The dragon snarls somewhere in the fog, the shadow of its head just visible amidst the thick smoke. Hannibal reaches down and curls a hand in Winston's scruff, and lets the dog lead him to the edge of the lake.

Will is there, on his knees. From his hands are pouring thick tendrils of the icy fog, his eyes closed in concentration. The fog is silver as it ebbs from him, swirls into shapes of animals, of monsters, of things with human faces, and Hannibal doesn't understand, doesn't recognize what spell this is.

Until the cold, and the look on Will's face – serene and placid – register. And then he knows.

This is Will's Patronus. A dense, unbreachable fog, through which anything is possible, and anything can hide. He steps up to Will and crouches behind him, and Will shivers as Hannibal threads a hand through his hair, presses his face to Will's nape. Will's entire body goes lax, and the fog, for a moment, thickens in his hands, spilling like salt in water and dissolving with the rest.

"I'm here, darling," he whispers, and Will's lips twitch in a smile. Still, he doesn't open his eyes.

He turns his head, and touches his nose to Hannibal's cheek. His voice, when it comes, is tight with strain, and he says; "Have Reba call to him. She knows him."

Hannibal nods, and leaves his mate though it pains him to do so. Still, the wolves and Winston flank Will, offering their protection against the beast. The lake has frozen solid under the chill of Will's charm, and Hannibal hears the dragon settle, crushing the ice beneath its feet.

"Reba," he says, and she looks his way. There are tears shining on her face, she's obviously terrified, but she nods in acknowledgement. "You must persuade him to stop."

She sobs, gripping her throat tightly, and turns her head when the dragon snarls again. It blows another jet of flame in Hannibal's direction, but Will's Patronus charm is powerful, the fog so cold and thick, that it only illuminates the beast's shadow again, and does not reach him.

"Francis!" Reba says, and Will lifts his head, tilts his hands and allows her voice to carry through the fog, to the dragon. Its snarls immediately go quiet. "Francis, stop this!"

"No!" Freddie shrieks, suddenly enough that Hannibal tenses, and looks at her. "They're the ones who took her from you! I was trying to protect her, they almost killed her!"

"That's not true," Reba says, but her voice is lost under the dragon's warning, vicious growl. It creeps closer, along the ice, and the lake cracks and groans under its weight. Will presses his lips together, unmoving. "That's not true. Francis, please!"

The dragon roars again, and lunges across the lake, and that is when Will stands, his eyes opening and his fog disappearing in a snap of breath, as if it never existed. Immediately, the wolves descend upon the dragon, so many of them Hannibal could not count their number. They lunge for the beast with snarling teeth, angry at such a monster for daring to invade their home. The dragon screams in pain, convulsing as wolves bite along its mouth, tear through his wings, rip at his throat. He swipes at them, but there are so many.

Reba collapses to her knees, sobbing openly. "Stop," she begs, and looks towards Hannibal. "Please. Make them stop."

Hannibal swallows, and looks towards the dragon. It gurgles on another jet of flame, choking as the molten fire pours from the holes in its mouth and neck, sizzling against the ice on the lake. It is starting to melt, and as heavy as the dragon and the wolves are, he can see that they will sink soon.

"Will," he whispers, and Will opens his eyes, gasping at the sight. He looks to Hannibal, his eyes wide like he's surprised at his own design, and then down at his hands. His fingers curl. "Will, my love, call them off."

Will nods, and whistles sharply. The wolves part from the dragon with another chorus of vicious snarls, teeth snapping through its hide and along its tail. Even though the dragon is still a beast, it is far from a threat, barely able to stand. It sinks through the melting ice as the wolves disperse, and with one final, great heave, lands with its head just resting on the edge of the lake. Its blood and fire turn the water black, and its great head settles with an exhausted heave on the edge of it, his eyes closing.

Reba runs to him, weeping openly as she falls to her knees at its head, her hands shaking and petting over the dragon's torn scales, his open mouth and broken teeth. "Francis," she whispers, and leans down to kiss his forehead.

Winston snarls, suddenly, and Hannibal turns to see Freddie taking out her wand, pointing it at Will. Her mouth opens in a scream and Hannibal is sure she means to throw the killing curse at him, but Abigail is quicker, and closer – she grips Freddie's wrist and snaps it back viciously, so that she cries out and drops her wand, cradling her wrist.

"Don't you fucking dare," she hisses.

Will walks over to the dragon's head, and kneels down beside Reba.

"Heal him," she begs him, gripping his hands tightly. "Please. Please heal him."

"Do you know what he's done?" Will murmurs, even as one of his hands flattens on the dragon's muzzle. The beast is breathing shallowly, his scent sharp with ash and with pain.

"We'll go far away," Reba promises. "We'll leave. Please. Just heal him, Will. *Please*."

Will presses his lips together, and looks to Hannibal in question. Hannibal doesn't have an answer for him – Will would understand, more than he, what it's like to live in darkness, to be afraid of just what kind of power lies within oneself. Hannibal cannot possibly have made a world where Will would thrive, and deny Francis the same opportunity.

Will sighs, and closes his eyes again, pressing both hands to the dragon's face. Hannibal watches, as, very slowly, Will begins to heal him.

He turns back to Freddie, finds her panting through the pain of her broken wrist, glaring at them all balefully. He must admire her ability to choose anger over fear, considering her circumstances. "Miss Lounds," he says quietly. "I suppose this is the time when you explain yourself."

"This isn't what was meant to happen," Freddie says. "You're supposed to -. *Will* is meant to…"

"You're putting far too much stock in Jack's journals again, I see," Hannibal says lightly. "Did you think you would take away a dragon's mate, blame Will or myself for it, and have one of us killed? So that the survivor would cover the world in a shroud of darkness?" He shakes his head, smiling. "You and your brother share similar mindsets."

Her eyes narrow. "I know you killed him," she hisses. "I know it was you."

"I'm afraid you're wrong again," Hannibal replies. "Just as Jack was wrong. Just as whoever wrote that damn prophecy in the first place was wrong." He sighs, and takes out his wand. "Normally I would afford you a fair trial, but you were about to murder my mate, and I cannot allow that slight to go unanswered."

"Wait!" Freddie says, her eyes wide, and she lifts her good arm in a plea for mercy. "Wait!" Hannibal's head tilts. She hesitates, and then picks up her wand in a swift movement, raising it again and pointing it at Hannibal. But before she can even straighten, and form the words, Winston lunges with a snarl, snapping his teeth around her neck. The flash of green magic goes upwards, dissolving in the open air, and she falls with a scream as Winston tears viciously at her neck, blood spurting up the same color as the dragon's scales.

Hannibal smiles, and tucks his wand away.

"Abigail, come here, darling," he murmurs, and she goes eagerly, tucking herself under his arm as they turn and walk towards where Will is still working his magic. The dragon's flesh has melted, and within the torn and broken remnants of its skull lies a man, shivering, clothes stuck dark and tight to his body. He is badly injured, moaning in pain, as Will continues to heal him. Hannibal can see it is weakening his mate, for Will is sagged down and almost curled in on himself, his hands shaking where they press to the man's shoulder.

"Will," Hannibal says, and goes to him. "Let me help you."

"I can handle it," Will snaps, lifting his upper lip in a snarl. Hannibal sighs, and kneels beside him, ignoring his protests as he takes out his wand and waves it over the man's broken legs. Abigail appears, her feet sloshing through the rippling, warming water, and she adds her own

spells to the process, until all that remains to show the man was injured at all is a deep scar along his upper lip.

"Is he okay?" Reba whispers, hands fluttering weakly in her lap. "Please, tell me he's okay."

"He's going to be fine," Hannibal assures her, as his part of the work finishes, and Will collapses with a gasp, and Hannibal pulls him into his arms. He kisses Will's hair, finds him slick with sweat from spending so much energy. Abigail stands, and pockets her wand, circling the dragon's skull and crouching down behind them, one of her hands on their shoulder each.

Francis groans, and his eyes open. He rolls onto his back and gasps to the sky, and then his eyes lift, and he sees Reba, and Hannibal cannot fault him for becoming so much like a beast, for he looks the same way at Reba as Hannibal does at Will, and if he thought Will was in danger, he would not have behaved any better.

"Reba," he rasps, and reaches up with a trembling hand. Reba finds it, clutching it in both her own, and kisses his knuckles, crying with relief. She smiles, and leans down, finding his face and kissing his forehead. Francis lets out a soft, broken sound at that. "Reba, I -."

"I'm okay," she whispers weakly. "We're okay."

Will shivers, and collapses against Hannibal. Hannibal can feel how exhausted he is, how he's barely clinging to consciousness. He kisses Will's forehead and holds him steady. "It appears the dragon has been slain," he says, and Francis and Reba look at them. "As far as I'm concerned, at any rate. And as far as the Ministry is concerned."

Fresh tears fall down Reba's face, and Francis sits up, careful not to knock into her. He swallows, looking down at his hands. His fingers curl, and flex, much like Will's did, as though surprised at his own power. What will the world be like, Hannibal wonders, twenty years from now, when no one of their power need fear who they are.

"You're not going to arrest me?" Francis asks.

Hannibal sighs, and shakes his head. "No more than I would arrest him," he says, and squeezes Will's shoulder, slides his hand to his mate's nape and pets through his sweaty hair. "You are perhaps in the company of the only people who understand, exactly, who and what you are."

Francis' eyes are wide, disbelieving – waiting for the other shoe to drop, he is sure. Then Reba takes his hand, and he turns to her, his expression softening into such a look of abject love that Hannibal feels he is encroaching on something too intimate to witness.

"We'll go far away," Reba says again, soft with promise, and nods to herself. "Somewhere safe."

Will coughs, and his inhale is shaky. "There's a house in Louisiana," he says, so quietly it's barely a whisper. "It's remote, and it's safe. You can stay there."

Reba's eyes shine, and she smiles. "Thank you, Will."

Hannibal nods, and looks to Abigail. "Darling, can you bear your father back to the castle?" Abigail nods, and changes shape, and Hannibal and Francis help Will onto her bony back. Hannibal retrieves his broom, and gives Reba and Francis another nod, before he mounts it, and he, Will, and Abigail take to the air.

A moment later, there is a soft rumble that stirs all the trees, and the dragon rises with a woman on his back, to a farewell call from all of the wolves.

Will sleeps for almost five days after the fight, unmoving and unresponsive. Hannibal keeps him nourished and strong with his magic, and hardly leaves his bedside. He was not injured during the fight, thank whatever power was watching over them, and Abigail leaves them be for the most part, helping Gideon and the rest of the staff repair the castle and transfer the students safely back to its hallowed halls.

On the fifth day, Will wakes, and Hannibal tells him he has not seen Winston. To that, Will merely smiles, exhausted and sweet with sleep, and says, "I let him go. He's free, now." Hannibal did not think Winston stayed with Will out of any obligation, but perhaps he is enjoying his vacation with his wolf cousins in the Forest, and will linger there a while.

Will sighs, and takes his hand in a tender, tired grip, squeezing gently. "I felt it," he whispers, and Hannibal tilts his head, brushing his hair from his face. "I felt the tide of fate, of destiny, rising up and threaten to swallow me whole. If you'd been killed…"

He doesn't say it. Hannibal knows.

"You doused that fire to ashes," he replies, and kisses Will's knuckles. "Perhaps there was some truth to Jack's theories."

Will huffs an exhausted laugh. "Or it'll go unfulfilled, like so many other prophecies," he replies, and sighs, turning onto his side with a wince. "I'd like to go spit on Jack's grave."

Hannibal laughs, and stands only long enough to shed his coat and shoes, before he lays down behind Will on their bed. Will rolls into him, crawls on top of him slowly, huffing with strain, and settles with his ear over Hannibal's chest.

"Minister! Minister!"

She turns, brow arcing in a way much like her father, as a lanky young man scurries up to her. She blinks in recognition. "Nicolas Boyle?" she asks, laughing, and shakes his hand. "It's been a long time. How are you?"

"Good, very good, thank you," Nicolas replies, flushing in surprise that she remembers his name. "I wanted to see if you'd grant me the pleasure of an interview, after the surprising vote that approved the dismantling the pre-crime department. If you have time, of course, Minister Hobbs."

"I'd be honored," Abigail purrs, and gestures for Nicolas to follow her into her office. Inside it rests a large wolfdog, and it lifts its head and huffs softly in greeting. She smiles at it, and pets over its head, before taking a seat. "Well, I suppose we should start with the flawed premise of pre-crime as a whole. Judging and convicting someone based on what was written in a prophecy is flawed at best, catastrophic at worst."

"Would you care to expand on that?" Nicolas asks, settling in the seat on the other side of her desk. He tenses, looking nervously at the wolfdog as it grins at him, and stands, trotting over to him and sniffing curiously at his hand.

"Don't mind him," Abigail says with a small, reassuring smile. "He just likes to know everyone I talk to. You were saying?"

"Yes. Right. Well, so you say that pre-crime investigations are flawed. What do you mean by that?"

Abigail leans on her desk, folding her hands and bracing her forearms against the edge of the sleek, gleaming, dark wood. "Well, Nicolas, I suppose to answer that, I'll tell you a story about a young boy that everyone thought would grow up to be evil…"

Will huffs, for he's heard this story far too many times, in testimonials and news coverage, and frankly grows bored of hearing his own life on repeat. He prowls out of the office, confident that Abigail can handle herself, and leaves the Ministry of Magic, following his nose to find Hannibal sitting under the awning of a little café, reading the paper. A muggle paper, he notes, for the lack of moving pictures.

Hannibal folds the paper, and smiles down at him. "They grow up so fast," Will purrs to him, grinning and settling himself at Hannibal's feet.

"That they do," Hannibal replies, his voice warm with pride. He nudges his toes beneath Will's flank. "Are you content to wait a while, or would you like to go home now?"

"We can stay," Will says with a yawn, settling at his mate's feet. "I like people-watching."

He can feel Hannibal's warm affection through the pendant sitting over his heart. He gives a rumbling purr of his own, and stretches out, content to wait until Hannibal finishes with his paper, and perhaps Will might join him in eating, disappearing just for a moment to change shape. They might wait until Abigail finishes with her meeting, so she can tell them if young Nicolas Boyle is someone they should keep an eye on.

The day is warm, the sun shining down upon them though they are cast in the shade. Will sighs contentedly, his tail thumping along the ground as Hannibal gives a soft hum in answer, and, soon after, a brindle mutt pads over to them and drops down next to Will's flank, rests his head on Will's shoulder, and joins in watching the crowd.

Chapter End Notes

There you have it! I know this ride was pretty wild given that there were three/four timelines happening all at once, but I hope you guys liked the journey! See you in the next fic <3

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!